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THE ONONDAGA GIANT.

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'Sandelfon !' burst from the lips of Listara. 'Your promise!' 'Now,
thou most truthful one, Sandelfon cannot lie

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THE ONONDAGA GIANT:

A STORY OF A LOST RACE.

BY COL. CHRIS FORREST,

Author of 'Hildebrand,' 'Captain Bob,' 'Leatherskin,' 'Crawling Snake,' 'Wild Bill's First Trail,' 'La Belle Helene,' etc.

NEW-YORK:
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THE ONONDAGA GIANT.

CHAPTER I.

"THERE WERE GIANTS IN THOSE DAYS."

BACK among the tangled jungles of Farther India, recent explorers have discovered ruins which illustrate the declaration of Holy Writ that "there were giants in those days," for those gigantic proportions were never modeled by architects who planned with any relation to the needs or uses of men of the ordinary measurement of the descendants of our "Adam." Science and Discovery join hands in taking away all that was mythical from our boyhood's belief, that there have been upon this earth, in days long gone by, human beings whose stately stature entitled them to look down upon the men of the present generation as degenerate dwarfs.

Away among the so-called "primeval" forests of Yucatan, Chiapas, and other wilderness provinces of Central America, slumber this day the wrecks and relics of mighty cities whose temples and palaces were evidently designed by and for beings whose statures greatly exceeded our own, and whose works bear a striking similitude to the wonders revealed by the Indian jungles.

There are massive columns of granite, whose proportions

dwarf in comparison the ruins which to this day make Egypt wonderful; temples in whose mossy porticoes grow oaks of untold centuries of growth; and there lie the gloomy forms of idols whose grand outlines almost compensate for their sombre ugliness and undefined meaning. Men like ourselves, building for proportions such as our own, never planned or builded these cities of the giants, and we do violence to all logic and all common sense when we refuse to accept the plain teaching of the granite records that "there *were* giants in those days."

The race has passed away, leaving few indeed of their many works to mock the power of "Time, the destroyer," but it is with the story of that vanished race—that royal race—that we have to do to-day. How it is that we are enabled to write it with such confidence and freedom will be recounted in its own proper place.

On the slope of a bold and lonely mountain, a peak of that spur of the central Cordilleras which forms the "back bone" of the peninsula of Yucatan, a solitary figure sat upon a detached mass of syenite and watched the slow uprising of the unclouded tropical sun.

To the eyes of men of this day his proportions would have been more than human, for, if he had stood erect, Tora, prince and high priest of the Vahtars, would have exceeded twelve feet in height, and the exceeding dignity of his face and bearing made his real size only the more majestic and imposing.

His only apparel was a loose robe of a pure white, woven of fine wool, and this had fallen from his shoulders, revealing the gaunt and even emaciated outlines of his gigantic frame. His face, through all its calm benignity and kingliness of expression, clearly showed the signs of great age, though not by any whitened locks or snowy beard, for not one vestige of hair appeared upon the high and well developed cranium or the square but well-proportioned chin. The Vahtars, giants in mind as well as body, were, nevertheless, a *hairless race*. No man, however, who looked twice upon Tora, would have deemed this a defect, but would rather have experienced a sensation of pleasure that the deep lines of that majestic countenance were permitted to disclose

their grand meanings unobscured by any disguising and perplexing over-growth.

So sat Tora, on the grey and mossy rock, gazing with eyes that did not blink, nor dream of vailing their own deep, mysterious fire, upon the growing glory of the almost equatorial sun.

Slowly his firm and nearly colorless lips opened, and he spoke as if talking to himself alone or to some invisible audience:

"Surely, if I have read aright, the hour which our race has ever looked forward to has nearly arrived. We no longer hold our world alone, and the coming of these swarms of dwarfs was ever known to be the sign and prophecy of our disappearance. It is now three centuries, almost the whole life-time of a Vahtar, since they made their appearance in the northern and southern wilderness, and now they are building up vast empires of their own, and multiplying like the ants. Even without wisdom they are more cunning than we, and the day of our disappearance draws steadily nearer. We can but bow to the decrees of fate, and we have long known and understood them."

Even while Tora was speaking, his ears caught the sound of a heavy footstep, crushing the dead twigs and leaves behind him, and now a deep, metallic, sonorous voice, interrupted his own solemn mutterings.

"Hail! Tora, my father! Why are you sitting thus, gazing into the warm face of the morning sun?"

"Is it you, Sandelfon, my son? Mine eyes were weary with night watching in the temple, and with poring over the ancient prophecies, and there is strength in the face of the morning sun."

"Ah my father those mournful prophecies—"

The new comer had now stepped out upon the sward at the base of the boulder upon which Tora was sitting. Somewhat less in height than his majestic parent, the son of the high priest of the Vahtars still stood up, in his warlike gear, nearly eleven feet of our own measurement. On his head was a helmet of bronze, from which depended long, sweeping plumes of white feathers, such as no bird of the present day can furnish, and he was girt with a cuirass of what seemed to be pure silver, white greaves and cuishes of the same metal protected his lower limbs, and his sinewy arms were bare of any covering except the cu-

riously wrought bracelets at his wrists. A splendid figure was Sandelfon, and his grand face was lighted up by such a smile as warmed the heart even of the weary and gloomy high priest, and he almost smiled as he answered—

“Those mournful prophecies, my son, of which you are wont to speak only too lightly, tell me that you will never take my place as the leader of what is now left of the world's primitive inhabitants.”

“And why not, my father?”

“For a thousand years all things have been steadily changing. The earth has been prepared to become the abode of lesser beings, and is no longer any place for such as we. Not only have our own numbers steadily diminished, but even we ourselves have decreased in stature and power. I alone am nearly of the height of my father, thou art less than I am, and no man of our people can show a higher crest than thine.”

“But we are still powerful, and we dwell alone. These swarms of dwarfs, whom you appear to dread so much, have not as yet crossed our path, whether for good or evil.”

“They will,—they will! But our worst foes are among ourselves, even now we are preparing for a struggle of life and death with Nuammi, who has dared to ally himself even with the dwarfs themselves.”

“He himself is almost a dwarf,” replied Sandelfon, “why he hardly reaches to my shoulder when he stands on tip toe.”

“Aye, but he is cunning and strong, and his sons are like him, and he has drawn such a party to his side that if I did not know what the result will be I would be almost doubtful of the issue of the battle.”

“We are to win, then?”

“We will win, my son, but at such a cost! Oh, for the good old times when no man had cause for wearing such a gear as that in which thou appearest this morning! Go now to the city, and do thy duty as a prince of the Vahtars.”

“And thou?”

“I will yet take more help and counsel of the sun, and then I too will come to my place and thine assistance.”

Sandelfon bowed his crested head and turned away through

the forest, with something of a gloomy shadow on his handsome countenance. Hardly had he gone a hundred paces, however, before his progress was arrested by a white hand pressed suddenly upon his shoulder, and a low, musical voice murmured in his ear.

"Sandelfon!"

"You here Listara?"

"Yes, I am here."

"And wherefore?"

"To see you once again before the accomplishment of that which is coming upon us."

"What mean you?"

Our destruction."

"*Your* destruction?"

"Yes, mine, as well as that of my father and brethren. You know that Tora has spoken, and no quarter will be given."

"Alas, it is so!"

"Sandelfon, the days are not our own. Promise me only that in the battle you will not lift up your hand against Listara."

"*My* hand? Against *you*?"

"Even though your father himself ordered you to strike."

"If the fate of all the Vahtars depended on the blow, I could not harm my Listara."

"Not your Listara!"

"Ha—not mine?"

"I am wiser than I was, Sandelfon, and I know that neither you nor I will ever know any other bridal than that of death. Even in that, however, we shall be true to each other."

"Listara."

"No—I must go. Farewell, remember the promise you have made to the daughter of your enemy."

One moment—only for a moment—a pair of white arms reached up and surrounded the pillar-like neck of the young prince, while the wind carried past him a wilderness of dark locks which were the evidence of Listara's descent from the new race of dwarfs, a pair of feverish lips were pressed hard upon his own, and then Sandelfon was left alone under the shade

of the gigantic mahogany tree, from behind which Listara had stepped to interrupt him.

The prince made no effort to follow her, but stood still, gazing gloomily into the dense foliage through which she had disappeared, but, as he aroused himself and started onward, he muttered in deep and half defiant tones,

"Harm her? Not if Tora bade me. We are troubling ourselves too much with these mouldy prophecies. I will win the battle, and then—Oh, if Listara was only of the pure blood of her fathers!"

CHAPTER II.

THE CITY OF THE VAHTARS.

Down the mountain side and into the wide-spreading valley strode Sandelfon. At another time, well accustomed as he was to the scene before him, he might well have been tempted to pause and enjoy the splendors of the grand vista below, for the whole valley was one vast and magnificent city.

Its size, however, furnished no fair means of estimating its population, for the several habitations stood well apart from one another, and were each of a size proportioned to the needs of their gigantic occupants, while the palaces and temples occupied full one fourth of the valley.

The mere dwelling houses were built for the most part of timber, of the almost indestructable and beautifully-tinted woods which the tropical forests around them supplied, but the structures devoted to worship, or other public purposes, were piled up of massive stone-work such as only Egypt and India can offer any parallel to among the records of earth's builders.

The architectural conceptions and effects which depend upon mere elevations were simply rendered in the huge proportions of pyramids, whose summits were invariably crowned with ominous looking altars, blackened with the sacrificial fires of untold ages of devotion, but around and beyond these there were colonnades and porticos, and the solemn forms of Sphinx-like idol

figures, hewn from the imperishable granite of the distant mountains, in shapes the magnitude of whose proportions suggested that some all but miraculous agency must have superintended their transportation to their present locality. Everything connected with the architecture and arrangement of this city of the Vahtars indicated the attainment of a high degree of civilization by its gigantic inhabitants. Its defensive walls, if such they could be called, were lofty but irregular, and included less than half of the city within their enclosure, seeming to have been either built with reference to the temples and palaces only, or at some earlier day when the city had not as yet attained its present population and proportions.

On the present morning the beauty and grandeur of the city of his fathers and his people seemed to have lost all power to arouse the admiration of Sandelfon. Once or twice he paused to gaze vacantly down the valley, upon battlements, towers and clustering homesteads, but his lips moved not and he once more strode onward.

The outer gates opened to admit him, as if of their own accord, and the Prince was in the main street of his capital. Here indeed an expression as of pain shot across his kindly and benignant countenance, for it seemed as if he was entering a city of the dead. Now and then a few sounds of life arose, but the only visible human forms that met his eye were here and there a few disconsolate looking children, most of them even smaller than the ordinary men of our own race, who wandered listlessly in and out among the colonnades, or lounged in the sun at the doorways of the seemingly deserted homes.

"All in camp:—all in camp!" muttered Sandelfon. "I wonder how many of them will ever come back again. Even the children seem to feel the crushing weight of these dismal latter days. Ah, Listara, I am ready to curse the ancient laws and the old prophecies with them! Curse them? Yes, but can I prevent their fulfilment? No, nor must I fail in my duty to Tora my father. Nor will I—unless—but then there will be no call for me to raise my hand against Listara, even in battle."

Sandelfon shuddered more than once, as he was talking, for one cause of the seeming desolation of the city was the fact that

among the Vahtars there was no distinction as to sex in the performance of public duties, and men and women alike armed themselves for the battle, and age itself, as it brought with it no decrepitude to that marvelous people, was never offered as an excuse from so important a service. Children alone, and children were but scarce with the giants of this generation, were permitted to avoid the field whereon Tora had determined to adjudicate with the sword between himself and the rebellious father of Listara.

But Sandelfon did not pause in the city, he hastened on down the central avenue by which he had entered, until he stood beneath the mighty archway of a gate that opened towards the south. Here he paused, for in the valley below him, and on the gentle slopes of the bordering hills, lay camped the last array of his immemorial race, prepared for their last battle field. And, more than this, still farther down, the eagle vision of the Prince could discern the waving banners of yet another host, and he knew that Nuammi, with his rebel Vahtars and the swarms of his dwarfish kindred, were now so near that the struggle which he dreaded was not only inevitable but close at hand.

There were other things to come before the battle, however, for the Vahtars had not raised the gloomy majesty of their pyramids and temples for nothing, and now that, as he could plainly see, the camp was all aroused and in motion, Sandelfon knew that his men of valor, and the women too, would soon be pouring through the gates for the midday sacrifice, and he retraced his steps into the silent and deserted solitudes of the great city.

CHAPTER III.

THE AMAZON PRINCESS.

At the close of her brief interview with Sandelfon, Listara had glided rapidly away through the forest. She was well aware that very nearly all the adults of the race of the giants were at that time in the camp, and that she was comparatively secure, yet she

could not avoid some feelings of apprehension, for she was but a woman, and in her veins the heroic blood of the Vahtars had been mingled with the quick and passionate pulsations of what they were accustomed to regard as an inferior race.

"Inferior?"

Yes, and yet the traditions and recorded prophecies which had been handed down from ancient days all assured the haughty giants that they were doomed to abandon the earth which they had once possessed and ruled, to the swelling multitudes of this very race whom they despised. And yet Listara's mother had been a woman whose magnificent beauty and rare endowments might well have won indulgence for any being less than celestial who had yielded to its overpowering attraction.

Nor had Listara failed to inherit her full share of the bewildering fascinations which had enabled her mother to accomplish her unconscious mission in aiding the division and destruction of the doomed race into which she had entered. Less than nine feet in height, but of perfect proportions, and marked from all women of pure blood by the flowing volume of her raven hair, the beloved of Sandelfon possessed a more than Juno-like majesty of grand and peculiar beauty.

Nor, truth to tell, did even her princely father or her warlike brethren disdain to take counsel of the clear brain and all but unerring judgment of Listara.

It was her unflinching courage which, in spite of the promptings of her passionate love, had bidden them to risk this last desperate struggle with the might of the Priest-Prince of the Vahtars, even though she knew that it would be led to battle by Sandelfon in person, and it was her seductive diplomacy which had gathered to their aid the swarms of Aztec dwarfs, men who scarcely measured six feet from the earth they stood on, who now mustered in the war of the rebellious but gigantic band who adhered to the fortunes of Nuammi.

A long detour through the mountain passes was necessary before Listara could reach the encampment of her father and his host, and again and again she paused—where some opening in the rugged spurs offered a distant view of the city—to contemplate

the stately grandeur of which she might have been the queen, but for her mother's fatal descent and her own diminished stature and luxuriant locks.

"He loves me," she said aloud, "but he is a slave to his priestly father and the mouldy traditions of his race. And yet, what a prince he is, and how I love him! I am worthy of him, too—if love is worthy. Aye, and beauty such as mine, and faith like mine, may well be balanced against his royal blood. I too am descended from the monarch of Anahuac, and the men who led the myriads of our ancient conquerors across the frozen sea and through the plains and forests of the land of gold."

And as she spoke, the young beauty raised her head proudly and stood erect, gazing down with flashing eyes upon the city of the giants. And then, softer emotions seemed to take possession of her, and gathering around her brow the flowing folds of her snowy, gold-embroidered robe, which was her only garment, Listara knelt upon the flowery turf and sobbed like a very woman.

The weeping fit may have been somewhat hysterical in its nature;—at all events it did not last long, and then the tears were wiped away from the proud dark eyes, and Listara resumed her devious path through the mountain passes. She met with no interruption, though more than once a prowling puma bounded away into the jungle at her approach, for the beasts of those forests had not yet learned to consider human beings as objects of successful encounter, much less, in the light of possible prey—the jaguar himself was a cat in the hands of the weakest of the Vahtars.

It was nearly the middle of the forenoon before Listara regained the camp of Nuammi and his motley followers, and she found her kinsmen busily engaged in their preparations for the struggle which was inevitable on the morrow, and greatly in need of her own presence and advice, for Listara had drawn lessons in the art of war even from the discourse of her princely lover and she never dreamed of allowing her affection to interfere with her duties to her father and her brethren. Nevertheless, no skill of generalship, nor any genius in planning the array, could war successfully against predestined and inevitable results

The Vahtars who adhered to the fortunes of Nuammi, though from their size, their splendid equipment, and the open order which their discipline prescribed, they presented an imposing array, were comparatively few in number, but they formed a most reliable central phalanx round which the auxillaries could gather, and these were like the sand on the sea shore.

There were Aztecs by the thousand, under the chosen chiefs of Anahuac and Tlascala; wild tribes with bow and spear from the central ranges of the Cordilleras; bands of men whose grand-sires had crossed the north western straits from that country of which they were rapidly losing even the traditions, and there was one battalion, peculiarly splendid in its array of jewels and gold, from that new empire to the southward, of which, hitherto, only vague and undefined rumors had as yet reached the city of the giants. In front of this contingent Listara paused a moment.

She had assumed a golden helmet and girded herself with a falchion of hardened bronze, in token of her leadership, and a more magnificent Amazon never stood in the front of battle since the days of that Pallas Athenæ of whom the Grecian sculptors dreamed.

Forth from the ranks before her strode a noble looking youth—for there were no cavalry, and the horse had not yet made the mark of his hoof upon the soil of America—and doffed his helmet as he addressed her.

"Most noble Princess, I and mine are ready to follow you

"I believe it, and I thank you,"

"I claim the privilege, oh, most noble and beautiful Listara, or fighting by your side in to-morrow's battle, and I would that my own heart might receive every weapon that is destined for your own."

"I do believe you to be my true friend, Chiaro."

"Your friend! Oh, Listara"—and here the young man's voice became low, deep, and all but tremulous—"only your friend? Can I claim no higher reward, if we win the day against these haughty and cruel enemies of your house?"

"Hush, Chiaro! This is no time to talk of such things. After the battle—"

"Well, after the battle—"

"We will meet then, if we are living."

"Ah, Listara, say not *if*—we *will* live, both you and I—we will conquer and we *must* live."

"Well, then, let us conquer."

"And then?"

"And then, I say, if we live and conquer, we will meet again."

"But if we meet?"

"I shall know how to meet my brave Chiaro."

The young man's face lighted up with enthusiastic hope, and he was ready to march to certain death in the service of the all but superhuman beauty who had led him captive.

Cunning and pitiless Listara! No one knew better than she herself how large a part her arts and her enchanting beauty had played in gathering to that banquet of death the fierce and ambitious young chiefs who brought their followers that day to the all but hopeless assault upon the last stronghold of the unconquerable kinsman of Anak the terrible.

And now a broad shouldered, low browed man, who made up in girth what he lacked in height, came towards her from the front rank of the rebel Vahtars.

"Listara, my daughter, I am glad to see you here. We had missed you."

"Nuammi, my father, I have done my duty."

"And I see that, as usual, you have done well. Only certain victory can wait the movement of such a host as this."

"Nothing is certain."

"Do you doubt?"

"I am not faint-hearted, but we must not forget with whom we are contending."

"I know, Tora the wise and the haughty, and his strong armed son, but even such prowess as theirs will be in vain against numbers like ours and genius like your own."

"We shall see, my father."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ALTAR OF BLOOD.

CUNNING and deep and artful as were Nuammi and his fascinating but deceitful daughter, they were neither more watchful nor more determined than their antagonists.

Tora and his son had decided not to await the inevitable attack behind the city walls, but to go forth into the open plain, after the manner of their heroic ancestors, and for this purpose they had armed and prepared the entire population of the city of the giants. If vastly inferior in numbers, at least none were to follow the banner of Tora who were not of the pure blood of the primitive race and endowed with all their own marvellous courage, vigor and vitality, and besides, the high priest already felt, and had openly announced, his mysterious assurance of complete and overwhelming victory.

The planning of the battle, however, and the due assignment of battalions did not include all of the preparations deemed necessary for the momentous occasion. The ancient customs of the Vahtars required the complete performance of the most solemn service of the great temple, with all its pomp of ceremony and its awful parade of cruel sacrifice.

And so it was that, before the sun had climbed to the zenith, crowds of gigantic men and women, again imparted life to the deserted squares and streets of the ancient city, and gathered in dense and silent masses around the foot of the central pyramid, on whose broad apex arose the mighty altar which for untold centuries had reeked with the smoking gore of the sacrifices required by the awful creed of the Vahtars.

And soon, while a thousand musical instruments of strange and forgotten form, gave forth their tumultuous voices, the majestic form of Tora appeared upon the summit of the artificial mountain, clad in all the splendour of his sacerdotal dress.

A deep silence fell on all the people, and it seemed as if the

multitude held their breath in expectation of that which was to follow.

Strange creed! Strange worshippers! No name had ever been given to the deity of their service, yet to him had the race of the Vahtars offered such sacrifices as these from time immemorial.

"Such sacrifices as these?"

Yes, *self immolation* was the crowning glory accorded to the votaries who owned Prince Tora as their chief, and next to this in honored rank was the gift of the lives of children. Nor were either wanting on the present occasion.

Warrior after warrior, male and female, came hastening up the difficult ascent of the pyramid, and a long line of semi-nude youths, of both sexes, seemed to have risen from the structure itself and surrounded the ancient altar. It was not difficult to divine why the race of the giants should decrease in number, if such scenes as this were frequently enacted.

Again the wild, tumultuous strains of music filled the air, utterly drowning all other sounds, so that if shrieks were uttered they reached no ear among the overlooking multitude, and when the music died away, huge volumes of smoke and flame were arising from the great altar, while its hideous carvings and its golden ornaments streamed with blood.

Again and again the music pealed forth, and with each fresh burst the hapless crowd of self-dedicated victims diminished in number, until, at last, as the red-eyed sun was beginning to retreat towards the west, the awful ceremonial was closed, simply for the reason that the supply of devotees was for the time exhausted.

Still, the flames and smoke continued to arise for hours, and, long after nightfall, their lurid light streamed out over the city of the giants, while a gray and heavy vapor, carrying with it a pungent and all but stifling perfume, rolled down the sides of pyramid and spread itself out among the streets and squares, reaching even to the camp itself, to which the armed multitude had retreated on the conclusion of the ceremonial, for no

true Vahtar could stay within stone walls when the voice of Tora bade him betake himself to the lines of the army.

Midnight came, and while the solemn gloom brooded like a prophecy of evil over the palaces and temples, and settled like a vail upon the massive hideousness of the idols in their shrines, two mighty figures came stalking out of the darkness and stood face to face in the dull glare of the slowly subsiding altar-fire.

"Where hast thou been, Sandelfon?"

"Not here, this day."

"And why not? Art thou not next to me, Prince and Priest of the ancient shrine of the Vahtars?"

"Aye, and if I *were* priest there would have been none of this wasteful horror, this day."

"Bold words, my son."

"To what end was this blood shed, will there not be more than enough of that to-morrow?"

"They were free offerings."

"So have they all been, and so our race is doomed."

"Alas, my son! Shall I tell thee that we are doomed in any event, and that thou thyself shalt be the last, self-given sacrifice of the ancient race?"

"I? No, not Sandelfon."

"Be not rash, my son, I have seen and known that which thou hast not. But we will bide our time."

CHAPTER V.

THE BATTLE OF THE GIANTS.

DURING the remainder of that anxious night Tora withdrew himself from every eye into a solitary chamber in the gloomy interior of the temple which arose behind the great pyramid of sacrifice. It was a small, square apartment, utterly without adornment, and its only furniture consisted of a few tables of

stone and a heavy antique lamp of bronze, which depended by a chain from the center of the smoke stained ceiling.

The lamp was burning with a clear and steady radiance which revealed the minutest objects in the chamber.

The stone tables were strewn with parchments and with instruments the knowledge of whose use has perished with the race which invented them.

Here was the customary retiring place and "study" of the high-priest, and here he now betook himself to the perusal of the mouldy parchments, with as much zest as if he had not pored above them with sleepless eyes for already many nights and days. From time to time he raised his head, and his lips moved as if in some mysterious calculation. Once or twice he consulted the characters graven on the strange looking instruments, but the few remaining hours of the night passed slowly and silently away. Nor did the lamp wane or require feeding or trimming all the night, until at last its light began rapidly to diminish, and in less than a minute Tora was left in utter darkness.

This did not, however, seem to be in any respect an unexpected or disconcerting occurrence, for Tora rose at once to his feet, saying as he did so—

"Ah, then, the sun has arisen, and I must join Sandelfon in the camp. There will be no morning sacrifice this day, and the altar will be cold at noon. Alas, how short a time before it will grow cold forever, and the doomed race disappear from the city around its feet! Still, I am glad of all that I have learned this night, and I will do the bidding of the sacred books to the letter."

A few minutes of rapid walking brought Tora to the southern gate of the city, and it was silently opened to him by the few guards in whose keeping it had been left.

As Tora passed through, he turned and uttered this stern and uncompromising command:

"On your lives, open not the gates to any that retreat. Never yet has one of our race taken to flight, and should one betray his cause this day, slay him in front of this gateway."

The guards bowed their helmeted heads in silent token of obedience, and Tora went on to the now rapidly awaking camp.

The different battalions were rapidly forming, under the orders of Sandelfon, and assuredly they presented a magnificent spectacle in the radiance of the morning sun. Probably there were not over five thousand of them, all told, but their great height, the splendor of their arms, and the open character of their order of battle, rendered necessary by their size and the sweep of their two handled swords of ten feet in length, caused them to appear several times as many, if they had been reviewed by one accustomed only to the armies of our own comparatively pigmy race.

Their arms were simple but effective. They were well acquainted with the art of hardening bronze to a more than steel-like firmness and fineness of temper, as their sculptures in the hardest granite yet testify, and their offensive and defensive armor bore a strong resemblance in many respects to that afterwards adopted by the Roman legionaries. The sword, however, was not like the short *gladius* of the Romans, but more nearly resembled the long and mighty weapon of the earlier crusaders. The polished bronze blazed in the sunlight like swords of flame, as the long lines of majestic warriors waved their weapons in their greeting to their leader.

And now arose an uproar of wild and sonorous music, not altogether wanting in sweetness, and then as if with one voice the army shouted the terrible battle cry of the Vahtars and demanded to be led at once against their foemen.

Tora's eyes kindled with awful light, and over the usually kindly countenance of Sandelfon there swept the stern enthusiasm of combat.

"We will not wait to be attacked. Oh, my father," he shouted. "We will meet them midway down the valley."

Hardly had Sandelfon spoken, however, before the deep and powerful voice of the high priest arose in a wierd and very nearly monotonous chant, as he strode in front of the stately and glittering array, as if to lead them in person. Far up the valley, and among the corridors of the temples, penetrated that

wonderful voice, and even the followers of Nuammi heard it as they at last began to move behind their standards.

And yet, not one, even of his own followers, unless it might be his princely son himself, comprehended the mystical battle chant of Tora, for, ancient as was their own race and speech, this tongue which their leader was speaking was a legacy from a yet older race, if indeed it had ever before sounded among earthly hills and valleys.

Nor did the mighty-limbed warriors press forward with any the less firm assurance of victory because they knew that the seer to whose solemn and inspiring tones they were listening had declared to them that the victory was already pre-ordained to perch upon their banners.

Seldom before, and never since, has the earth witnessed a sight more grand, more awe-inspiring, than the last march of the giant race to battle, with that majestic figure chanting in their van.

But if the march itself was sublime, what shall be said of the final collision, where the tall forms of Nuammi and his rebels at last crossed swords as strong as their own with the enthusiastic warriors of Tora! Then indeed did it seem as if the air was filled with flashing swords of fire, and the huge spears seemed to emit lightnings as they hurtled towards their glittering targets. The clangor of the first collision might well have struck terror into the hearts of the dwarfish auxiliaries of Nuammi, but Listara had looked forward to some such effect, and had herself remained with them to counteract it, and now she called upon the devoted chiefs whom she had enticed to her service, to lead their followers to the charge.

Never had she appeared so alluringly, and a sort of frenzy seemed to enter the hearts and brains of those whom she addressed, and they obeyed her in a fierce, desperate rush which bore them on into the thickest of the affray.

For once, however, Listara's genius had been at fault, for her undersized auxiliaries, swarming into the open array of the rebel Vahtars, did but entangle and confuse them, so that numbers of themselves went down under the chance strokes of the very men they were endeavoring to aid, while no flying spear or

javelin or arrow from the opposite side reached the earth without discovering a victim on its way.

The carnage was terrific, on both sides, but chiefly among the auxiliaries of Listara. On, like a destroying angel, strode Tora, still chanting his mysterious battle hymn, and on went the resistless falchion of Sandelfon, before whose steady sweep every opposing crest went down, and the gilded bucklers were shattered like brittle pottery.

The sun rose high in heaven, and still the fight went on, till all along the lines the earth was piled with ghastly heaps of slain and wounded.

Once only had Sandelfon caught sight of Listara, and his eyes kindled with a fierce admiration as he witnessed her daring and prowess even though exercised against himself and his cause. Nor did the beautiful Amazon fail to note the warlike wonders performed by her glorious and beloved Prince.

Nevertheless, as if by mutual consent, they each turned away from one another, lest by any chance they should be hurried into too near a proximity.

And now, when even Sandelfon's heart experienced a twinge of pity as he gazed upon the awful slaughter on every side, he suddenly found himself confronted, in a solid phalanx, by that jewelled band of southern dwarfs whose leader had promised to meet Listara after the battle. They had suffered severely and their ranks were thinning rapidly, but they kept their close and perfect formation, and their chief still fought uninjured in their front. Up to this time the young Prince of the giants had disdained to war with any but those of his own race, though many a descendant of Adam had been borne by his evil fate across the path of his javelin or under the chance stroke of his sword, but now there were no rebel Vahtars within reach, and, all but single-handed, Sandelfon charged the head of the solid phalanx. There seemed to be some wonderful charm of invulnerability in his noble and unprotected face, for neither spear nor arrow touched, though clouds of them were intended to mar its princely beauty. The Peruvians, if indeed such they were, went down in swathes, like grass before the mower, as their terrible assailant strode onward, and the common warriors were seized with a sort of panic,

half believing that some supernatural being stood before them, Backward reeled the shattered ranks leaving their undaunted leader face to face with Sandelfon, and evidently ready to dare the utterly hopeless chances of single combat. Sandelfon spoke,

"Dwarf though thou art, thou art brave; what is thy name, that I may know whom I slay?"

"I am Chiaro, the beloved of Listara. I am a prince as thou art, and my love it is which enables me to meet thy giant bulk."

The light fled from the face of Sandelfon, and he replied,

"Thou hast lied and thou must die, for I alone am the beloved of Listara. Ask of me what thou wilt before I slay thee."

"Nay, if I slay thee I will bear thy head to the feet of Listara, and if thou slayest me thou shalt send or bear my collar of gold to my father the Inca."

And even as he said these words, Chiaro sprang forward with lion like courage and a strength which would have stood him in good stead with any other opponent, but Sandelfon was known as "the strong" even among the Vahtars. Disdaining apparently the use of his sword, he dropped his fatal blade, and parrying the stroke of Chiaro, he siezed him around the waist. And now a sudden fury, as of jealousy, darkened the soul of Sandelfon, and his mighty strength seemed multiplied. One vigorous motion of his sinewy arm, and the head of Chiaro was wrenched from his body so suddenly that the golden collar dropped between them to the earth. The body was hurled to a distance, among the ranks of the dismayed Peruvians.

And then in one hand Sandelfon picked up his sword and in the other he held the head, and on his wrist hung the collar of gold, while he turned away, searching the field with blazing eyes as if he cared now to see but one object.

The battle was indeed now clearly won, and the confused mass of the auxilliary dwarfs were only impeding one another in their frenzied efforts to escape from the swords of their destroyers. But, in the center, the remnant of the rebel Vahtars still held their ground in a firm array, well knowing that only death was before them, and determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible. At their head still fought Nuammi and his long-haired sons, and there, too, still flashed the wonderful beauty of Listara.

The latter, however, now suddenly turned deadly pale, and the point of her spear drooped towards the earth, for down the lines of her foemen she heard a cry which told her that Sandelfon was approaching.

The tall form of Tora also, now towered among the ranks that were gathering for the final onset.

"He is coming!" gasped Listara. "Will he remember? Oh! what agony to see his own hand lifted up against me! Death is nothing, but from him—"

She ceased, for the ranks in front of her divided, and a well known presence stood, spattered from head to heel with the fearful vintage of that day's wine press of wrath, but still splendid and most princely.

"Sandelfon!" burst from the lips of Listara. "Your promise!"

"Nay, thou most truthful one, Sandelfon cannot lie, he has but come to bring thee the head and jewels of thy beloved—thy Chiaro—so, I will keep the collar to do with it as he bade me."

And as he spoke Sandelfon cast the gory trophy at the feet of his beautiful mistress, and for a moment a paleness came upon her as she recognized the handsome, but now marble features.

"At least," she said, "thou hast not smitten *me* in slaying *him*. I am still Listara, and I can still bid Sandelfon keep his word."

And now arose the voice of Tora himself—

"My son, why slayest thou not the daughter of thine enemy? I bid thee smite her to the earth."

"Not so, my father, I will touch her not—she must fall by another hand than mine."

"Then indeed, thou disobedient and erring son, the curses that are written have come upon me and mine and upon thee and thine!"—and then once more arose the mysterious war-chant of the grim high-priest, and once more the destroying Vahtars pressed harder and harder upon the remaining handfull the rebels.

Down went Nuammi and his long-haired sons, and down with them fell their unflinching followers, until, as the sun was setting Tora strode across the bleeding body of the last of his foemen.

As for Listara, she must have fallen in the indiscriminate melee, but it had not been by the hand of Sandelfon, nor even that of Tora, and for this the heavy heart of the young prince grew somewhat lighter

CHAPTER VI.

THE MIDNIGHT VIGIL OF TORA.

AND now Tora and his son met face to face among the horrid wrecks of that unequalled battle.

"Art thou angry with me, Tora, my father?"

"Not I, my son, thou hast but fulfilled that which was foretold concerning thee, and should I be angry?"

"Thou knowest,—not I. But what shall we do now?"

"Do? why there are enough of us left to perform that which is fitting by that which the sword has left."

"But our foemen!"

"As ourselves. There is especial reason, in this day, that not one of these, whether our foes or our brethren, should be permitted to leave their bones upon this plain, above the earth or under it."

"And the dwarfs?"

"Where they have fallen, there let them lie. We have nothing to do with them. Besides, we shall have all we can do to attend to our own."

And truly this was likely to be the case, for scarce a third of the Vahtars, male or female, remained uninjured, while fully half of those who had marched out so gallantly that morning would never more arise from the bloody beds where they were now lying. One only had sought safety in the city before the battle was over, and his fate had been that which was commanded by Tora.

From time immemorial the only form of burial known among the Vahtars had been that of fire, nor were the ashes themselves preserved, but were committed to the swift currents of the rivers,

that they might be borne to the deep, mysterious tomb which the ocean itself provided. And now there was to be such a funeral service as had never been before, and it would certainly last for days. Every body had to be brought within the city walls, and the vast appliances of the most ancient temples were all to be put in requisition.

Having given the necessary orders to their subordinates, Tora and his son re-entered the city, but at the gates of the temple they parted, for their errands were different. The Priest had ghostly work to do, in which he permitted no companionship, while the heart of the young Prince was heavy, and he longed to be alone with his own thoughts in the inner silence of his own palace chambers.

We must first pass on into the temple with the high-priest himself. Tora walked slowly through the cool and shadowy corridors of the temple, towards his own private place of study. The day had been well spent before the battle closed, and gloom was rapidly deepening in the interior of the building, but, as Tora stepped across the threshold of his own mysterious apartment, the mighty lamp of bronze, after oscillating backward and forward for a few times like a pendulum, with slow and measured movement, stood still once more, and, as if it had been lighted by unseen fingers, steadily increased in brilliancy, until a revealing flood of light poured down over the simple but deeply interesting accompaniments of the High-priest's retirement.

"Ha," said Tora, "has the sun set already, thou unerring chronicler of days and nights! Then indeed I must hasten to my work, for there is much before me."

Even as he spoke, he stepped across the room and bore with his whole weight, as it seemed, against the solid wall.

"Solid?"

Yes, solid enough against the application of any ordinary strength, but, under the mighty shoulder of the gigantic priest, a vast slab of reddish granite slowly yielded and swung back upon its hinges, revealing a crypt or closet, which was nearly half the size of the chamber from which it opened.

Here, piled loosely in the corners, or stacked up along the sides of the walls in heavy ingots and bars, were treasures of gold fit

to have satiated the gnawing greed of a Cortes or a Pizarro, while the little heaps of cut and uncut diamonds which sent back the radiance of the now fiercely glowing lamp were piled of jewels such as never since were brought forth from the troubled sands of Brazil or Golconda.

Not for these, however, not even to so much as glance at their dazzling richness, had Tora opened his secret treasure house—what to him were these vain accumulations, when the last days of his race were closing darkly around him?—his interest was concentrated upon a low marble table in the centre of the crypt, on which arose a little heap of ancient parchments, even more mouldy and antiquated in their appearance than those which lay scattered in the outer room. These he gathered in his broad palms and reverently carried forth, carefully swinging back to its accustomed place the door of massive granite. There was little fear that any strength less than his own would ever pry into the secrets of his singular treasure vault.

This done, Tora brought in from some other part of the temple a heavy bronze tripod, which supported a chafing dish, of moderate size but of curious workmanship, and which was already nearly filled with glowing coals.

By this he seated himself, under the full glare of the dangling lamp, and ever and anon, as he opened scroll after scroll, and shook from them the gathered dust and mould, he dropped fragments of some mysterious substance, like transparent gold, upon the red heat of the coals. As he did so, a thin blue vapor, carrying with it a most exquisite and powerful perfume, arose and pervaded the chamber. The outer entrance had been carefully closed, and the delicious pungency which loaded the still air of the high priest's chamber of counsel could not escape into the temple.

Tora seemed utterly absorbed with his perusal of the ancient records, and the motion of his hand, as he pressed fresh incense on the fire, appeared to be almost mechanical. The perfume, however, was evidently something more than a mere tribute to the sense of smell, for, under its influence the countenance of the Vahtar leader seemed to acquire an almost preternatural radiance and his deep sunken eyes shone with a light even more awe-

inspiring than that which they had worn when he led his warriors on to the last terrible battle field.

Then, at last, his lips opened, and a deep, solemn, monotonous voice came forth, seeming to read aloud that which was written in the scroll which Tora was holding, but doing so in a chant of careful and measured cadences, as if he were giving utterance to the words of inspired poetry, or was sounding the requiem of the race which was departing.

How long this continued it would be difficult to say, but at last, the high-priest arose to his feet like one in a trance. The light had faded from his eyes, and there was no vestige of color remaining in his ghastly, drawn, and stony countenance.

One after another he placed the ancient manuscripts upon the glowing tripod, and flames of strange and vivid color shot upward as they crackled, shriveled and disappeared, not even leaving any ashes behind them. Tora did not cease his chanting nor did he seem to be thoroughly conscious of that which he was doing, until the last of the parchments which he had perused so carefully had vanished under the pitiless heat, and then, clasping his mighty hands before his face, his voice died away to a hoarse whisper and then to utter silence, and then, as the dense and pungent perfume seemed almost to take the place of air in the chamber, he slowly sank upon the granite floor, and lay as one dead.

Dead he was not, however, though hour after hour went by, and still he lay in his breathless trance, with the tripod glowing beside him and the fierce light of the central lamp pouring its radiance upon his pallid face, for, just as the light began to sink in the room, in token of the approach of day to the external world, Tora slowly opened his eyes, rose to his feet, resumed his flowing robe, and strode out into the echoing corridors of the temple. He had gathered into his own intelligence that ancient lore of which there could now be no further transmission among the denizens of earth.

Although the dying fire of the sacred lamp in the mystical chamber of records had declared the rising of the sun, the vale of the Vahtars still lay shrouded in profound gloom, for not yet had the light arisen above the shadowy barrier of the mountain

ranges which encircled it. Only the tops of the loftiest peaks were gilded by the returning radiance, from eternal snows gleaming with a ghastly and undaylike whiteness, as they reflected the forerunners of the coming day.

When Tora stepped out upon the elevated portico of the temple, the city lay below him in profound silence. The streets were utterly deserted, and the heavy gloom seemed to cover them like a pall. For a moment Tora gazed out upon the mighty walls and pyramids and towers without speaking, but even the iron-hearted priest of the giants was susceptible to emotions of patriotic sorrow.

"Oh, city of my people!" he said, at length, while his broad bosom heaved convulsively. "Art thou indeed doomed to lie utterly waste and desolate? Shall the sons of those who built thee indeed depart from thee forever? At least I bless the ancient prophecies for this, that from them I know that no other race than our own shall ever possess thy temples and palaces. No other sacrifices shall ever burn upon the altars of the royal race. The dwarfs who are to come shall know thee not, or knowing, they shall shun thy mournful solitude and leave thee alone in the shadow of the forests which shall cover thee. All that the fire shall leave of thee shall be forever sacred. Forever? I know not that, but it seems to be forever.

As he finished his prophetic utterances, Tora bowed his face for a moment in his hands, but he quickly recovered himself, and once more assumed the high and stern serenity which belonged to his character and mission.

"One more task have I, this morning, and I must hasten to its performance."

The pavement gave back no echoes to the tread of his naked feet, as Tora strode onward with swift but measured steps towards the southern end of the city.

Here, almost solitary, in the middle of a grand square or plaza, arose a building, evidently a temple, which differed very much in its design and architecture from the other sacred edifices of the Vahtars.

Something there was in its massive outlines which would have reminded a modern observer of the wonderful structure of Egypt,

though its gray and time-worn stones betokened an age beside which that of the pyramids would be as infancy.

Alone, untenanted, unguarded, apparently long abandoned and neglected, stood the strange relic of ancient days.

Tora paused not upon the mossy threshold, but swiftly mounted the gigantic stairway which led into the central gloom of the temple.

Here indeed, was almost darkness, but he seemed too familiar with the locality to err in his footsteps. From a pile of dry pine branches which lay upon the floor he selected a huge knot, and as he quickly ignited it, a strong and fitful glare was thrown upon the walls, the huge pillars, and the vaulted roof above him.

Tora waited until his torch was well kindled, and then as he raised it high above his head, it revealed to him a sight which seemed to arouse the stormiest emotions of his soul.

At the further end of the vast hall of the temple, upon a mighty structure of porphyry, which seemed half throne, half altar, arose the huge proportions of an idol figure, with whose unnutterable hideousness was, nevertheless, blended something of an expression of majesty and power; but it was the power and majesty of evil and of sin.

Unguarded, and unprotected as it was, the grim and distorted statue was yet covered with ornaments of gems and gold. Theft was unknown among the Vahtars, and sacrilege an impossible crime.

The figure was semi-human in its outline, a monstrous combination of man and brute, and it couched upon its altar-throne in a sitting posture. Upon its outlandish head a jewelled crown arose, and in one unsightly claw it grasped the semblance of a sceptre.

Bearing aloft his blazing torch, Tora approached the foot of the idol figure.

"And thou," he said, aloud, "thou emblem and representative of the fate under which I and mine are falling, thou shall by no means remain behind us to mock at our fate. When, in the years to come, beings of another race come to explore the ruins which we must leave behind us, they shall not find thee here, to tell them lies concerning the ancient race."

Upon the lap of the idol, as if waiting for some arm strong

enough to wield it, there rested a gigantic hammer of bronze. Not Tora himself ever lifted such a massive and crushing emblem of destructive power, but the high-priest of the giants seized it in both his hands, and seemed to lift it as a child might raise a toy.

"Well wast thou provided against this day, and glad am I that I am bidden to use thee thus."

As he spoke, Tora stepped back three paces, and, gathering all his wondrous muscular power into a terrific effort, he bounded forward and hurled the full weight of the hammer against the head of the idol. The temple rang again with the echoes of the stroke, and the huge figure tumbled heavily from its porphyry pedestal, breaking into fragments as it crashed upon the granite floor.

Jewels of gold and precious stones were scattered in all directions, and the grinning head fell apart by itself, as if gazing with stony eyes upon the wrecks of its late magnificence.

But Tora paid no attention to the paltry wealth which lay around him, he seemed to be only bent upon effacing every vestige of the object of his wrath. Leaning his torch against the altar, he plied the hammer with swift blows upon the head and the other fragments of the idol, as if determined to grind them to powder. In a short time indeed, the work was thoroughly accomplished, but not even a bead of perspiration on the brow of Tora told of any unusual exertion.

"It is done," he said, "and of all the needs of these fatal days this alone has yielded me and pleasure or satisfaction. And yet I know only too well that in this I have but set the seal upon the doom of my race and of mine own house."

No one paused to address their gloomy ruler, as he made his way in silent majesty towards the great central temple.

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNEXPECTED MEETING.

DIFFERENTLY had Sandelfon disposed of himself, and of the night-hours after the battle. On parting with his father at the gate of the temple he had bent his slow and deliberate footsteps towards the lofty portals of the palace which was set apart to his own private use as a Vahtar Prince.

The streets of the city were no longer deserted, but were alive with an ebbing and flowing throng of those who were anxious to ascertain the fate of friends and relatives, dotted here and there with squads who bore on their muscular shoulders the litters whereon lay the suffering forms of the badly wounded.

Before long, as Tora's orders should be disseminated, there would be even more mournful processions of those engaged in bearing the bodies of the slain to the different temples where the solemn rite of cremation was to be performed. Sandelfon turned neither to the right nor to the left, and in a few minutes he had reached and ascended the long flight of steps which led to the doorway of his lordly home, and was passing rapidly from room to room toward his own private apartment.

The palace of the prince was constructed largely of hewn and sculptured stone, yet a profuse use had been made of valuable and beautiful woods, not only in mere ornamentation, but even in essential portions of the building itself, and such was generally the case in the city of the giants, as the climate almost precluded the employment or the fear of fire.

The several apartments were planned with reference and in proportion to the stature of the mighty race who had builded them, and especial pains had been taken to secure ventilation and cool shade. In the courtyards fountains were playing, and every where a profusion of flowers and green climbing plants bore witness to the love of nature and the beautiful which distinguished the primitive inhabitants of the western as well as of the eastern world.

Of furniture, according to the prevailing notions of the present

day, there was comparatively little to be seen, though here and there embroidered curtains of exceeding richness and beauty depended from heavy mouldings of bronze or gold, while, as the prince entered the suite of rooms which were especially appropriated to his own use and drew back the voluminous hangings that kept out the dying light of day, he revealed not only sumptuous couches, but other articles of comfort and luxury which have their corresponding forms among the garniture of much more modern "houses of the king."

As the darkness rapidly deepened, Sandelfon lighted one small and exquisite lamp of silver, that burned with a mild but steady radiance, and whose illuminating power was only sufficient to soften the gloom of the lofty chamber, and deepen the shadow cast by the young prince, as he paced nervously back and forth from wall to wall.

Sandelfon soliloquised:

"He did not lie, or if he did he knew it not, for there was truth in his voice. I slew him? Yes, I would have slain him anyway, but he made me mad."

And then there came across his mental vision a remembrance of the glorious beauty of Listara, with her streaming hair, as she flashed across the front of the great battle. And then again he remembered her expression of mingled sorrow and scorn, as she had repelled his accusations when he threw at her feet the gory head of the unfortunate Chiaro.

Then his thoughts went back to many a secret tryst beneath the primeval forest, carefully concealed from the knowledge of Tora, his father, and even from her own kinsmen and friends.

How loving she had been, and yet how full of mournful forebodings of the future, which were now even too terribly well fulfilled.

"And now," he said, aloud, "she has fallen, as she prophesied, in the heat of a great battle, and I am left bereft of love, and the last prince of a people whom my own father declares to be doomed to destruction, and I myself with them!"

Again the prince paced up and down, his mailed sandals falling upon the marble floor with a dull, metallic clank, that roused no answering echo. Again he spoke—

"But at least I kept my promise. I was jealous. I was mad,

but I did not lift my hand against her, and now by all the blood that has been shed this day, I do believe her true. Oh, Listara! *My* Listara! Dead—dead!”

As he uttered the last words, in a deep and tremulous undertone, which only too truly declared his overwhelming sorrow, there was a slight rustling in a mass of pendant drapery that swung near him, and the mournful music of a voice which he knew only too well startled his unexpected ear—

“No, Sandelfon, Listara is not dead.”

“Listara! Alive, and *here*?”

“Yes, I am here.”

“But how—wherefore?”

“How? I was but stunned by a blow on my helmet from one of your giant warriors, and after the battle I awoke beneath a heap of slain, and had no difficulty in finding my way hither among those who are bearing in the dead.”

“But wherefore here, when the death you have so wonderfully escaped does but wait for you in new and multiplied forms of horror.”

“Are *you* not here?”

The tender pathos of this simple question drove to the winds any remains—if any there were—of the jealous distrust which had been aroused in Sandelfon by the boasting words of Chiaro and with a mighty stride forward he swept his beautiful visitor in his arms.

Listara was still in the warlike gear which she had worn through that day's fearful encounter, and their mailed breasts clanged strangely against one another. It was an embrace such as no other lamp had ever lighted, or ever again should shine upon, so long as the round earth swung in its orbit.

Only for a brief space, however, did Listara yield to the sudden passion of her giant lover.

“And now, Sandelfon,” she said, “I have seen you and I must go.”

“Go? and why?”

“This no place for the doomed daughter of Nuammi.”

“Not doomed, Listara, Tora need not even know of your presence. Are you not aware that in this palace half the kinsmen

of your father, were he alive to-day, might hide unsuspected for a century?"

"No, but, Sandelfon, listen. I am only too well aware that my mother's beauty, and my father's disregard of the warnings of Tora the priest, have brought upon the race of the Vahtars all the evil which has fallen, this day. I love you too well to bring destruction upon your head. Besides, did I not hear the words of your father, when he bade you smite me, in the battle? Ah, Sandelfon, why did you not forget your love and your promise and obey him? Almost I could wish that you had done so."

"I had better have died! Have I not you in my arms this night as my reward?"

"The reward of disobedience?"

"No, Listara, of my truth, even when sorely tried."

"Then, I also will be true, for I have read my duty and learned my future only too well, and I must leave you."

"Leave me? But you will come again?"

"I know not. Something tells me that you will never hold me in your arms again. I have an expiation to make for your sake."

"For mine?"

"Yes, and for much deceit and cruelty, Sandelfon—"

"What is it, Listara?"

"You still have the golden collar of Chiaro?"

"Yes, I brought it with me."

"Will you not, then, send it to his father as a token of his fate? There were no fugitives to bear the news."

"I will. Is there aught else?"

"Nothing, to-night. Farewell, my Sandelfon!"

"I cannot say farewell."

"Then I must go without, for I have that on my mind which will not let me stay."

It was a strange parting, and powerful must have been the feeling which left the "Strong Arm" of the Vahtars, the young prince of the giants, bowed in almost convulsive grief by the side of the porphyry pedestal which upheld the dim effulgence of the silver lamp. It was an hour before he raised his head—a gust of wind had extinguished the lamp, and all was darkness without and within for Listara was indeed gone!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HEROINE AT THE ALTAR.

AT some time in the past the city of the giants must have contained quite a numerous population, but even that would not account for the number of the temples or the magnitude of the preparations which had been made in them for performing the last solemn rites for the dead. The true explanation was that from all the region round about, and for hundreds of miles north and south, it had been the custom to bring the bodies of deceased Vahtars to their most sacred city. When one of them found that his end was drawing near, his last and most religious duty was a pilgrimage to the temple of his nameless deity, bearing with him such offerings as would provide for the cost of the ceremonial.

This is not the place for a description of the sacred furnaces—when the eye of modern science comes to examine their remains all that will doubtless be attended to. All night long the surviving giants had toiled at their gloomy task, and when morning light returned the last of the sad relics of the battle field had been removed to its proper receptacle in one or other of the temples. Only the Vahtars, however, had received this honorable attention. for the heaps of the dwarfs were only disturbed in order to ascertain if any of the royal race were slumbering beneath them, and in this exhibition of their pride of race, the short sighted giants, as well be seen hereafter, were only adding to the other follies, by which, in spite of their boasted wisdom, they had aided in fulfilling the prophecies of their destruction.

Now, however, as the sun slowly climbed the eastern sky, the different temples presented an appearance of unwonted animation, and mighty forms in gold embroidered robes stalked rapidly to and from the towering shrines, or paused to exchange with one another their melancholy greetings and enquiries. The solemn influence of the day and its duties, no less than the universal bereavement, weighed heavily upon the hearts and minds of all, and even the children could not smile.

"Even the children?"

They least of all, for few as were the remaining youths of the Vahtars, immemorial custom required a mighty sacrifice that day and the victims had already been selected and gathered in the subterranean chambers beneath the pyramid of "burnt offering."

Slowly as the sun ascended, he at last drew near the zenith, the hour of noon drew steadily nearer, and, as it did so, the footsteps of all turned as with one accord towards the broad plaza at the base of the awful shrine.

All came, and yet, when they were assembled, they could scarcely be called a "crowd," for less than two thousand Vahtars were left to people the grand solitudes of the city of the giants,

Again the vast volume of their strange music uttered its voices, and again the chosen victims were rapidly diminished as the horrid ceremonial progressed, and again the thick black smoke, penetrated here and there by tongues of leaping fire, arose from the face of the great altar.

The people stood in breathless silence until it seemed that the last blood had been shed, when, suddenly, a form in a white robe stepped forward from among themselves and began to ascend the massive stairway which formed the side of the lofty pyramid.

Less in height than the average of Vahtar women, the long, raven tresses which streamed back over her robe still more distinctly announced the lineage of the climbing figure.

Still, though nearly all recognised her, not a tongue breathed her name, nor was it until he stood face to face with her on the summit that Tora himself, in a clear and trumpet-like voice, which could be heard by all, inquired,

"Why art thou here, Listara, we had thought thee dead?"

"I am dead, and yet I am not, for I have come to my place."

"Thy place?"

"Upon the altar."

"Why, and what right hast thou there?"

"That I may free Sandelfon from the curse which his love for me has brought upon him."

"It is in vain, for it has fallen."

"Then it is time for me to fall, also, for my kindred have fallen before me. It may be too, that if I die less harm will come hereafter upon him I love."

And as she spoke, the dark beauty of Listara assumed such an expression of heroic self-devotion that even the marble heart of high-priest was stirred with a thrill of admiration, but he did not for a moment relent, for he answered,

"Die indeed thou shalt, but not upon the altar which has never known other blood than that of the ancient race."

As he spoke, Tora bowed his head for a moment as if in perplexity, unable to decide as to what should be done with the beautiful devotee.

That moment's hesitation was enough, for Listara bounded by him, and as she did so she drew from the folds of her robe one of the keen, broad, sacrificial knives of the Vahtar priesthood.

A cry arose from the multitude, and Tora was aroused only in time to witness the act of self-immolation.

The clear and musical voice of Listara floated out over the heads of the people.

"Farewell, Sandelfon!"

And then, even at the moment that her firm, white hand planted the knife in her bosom, she bounded far in among the smoke and flames of the altar.

Tora himself was powerless to now prevent the accomplishment of the heroic purpose of the devoted girl, but a different necessity now called for his prompt action. As if summoned by the last utterance of Listara, the form of Sandelfon himself, in the dress of the Vahtar priesthood, came forth from the recesses of the pyramid and stood before the altar, gazing about him as if in search of her who had named him.

"Oh, Tora, my father, where is she?"

"It is her own deed, my son, I touched her not—but she is *there*!"

And Tora pointed to the altar.

A spasm as of some strong agony shook the frame of the young prince, and he said:

"Then will I also take my place by her side—"

It was a thrilling moment, and, accustomed as they were to receive in blind and passive obedience whatever might be the decrees of fate, and trained by the traditions of untold centuries to oppose no voice or motion to the absolute dominations of their princely priests, with their parchment oracles, not even the Vah-tar multitude could gaze unmoved upon the romantic and thrilling occurrences which were taking place before them. Certainly, never upon any earthly stage was enacted a more mournful and touching tragedy, and now, when it seemed as if their beloved young Prince himself, the last of his sacred and royal line, was about to follow his beloved Listara into the devouring flames of the great altar, a shudder of dread and an audible groan of horror ran through the mighty assembly.

Crowding through the dense masses, thrusting them right and left, pressed the figure of an armed warrior. The clotted blood reddened his cloven helmet, and his gilded armor gaped in many places over deadly wounds, for it was no other than Nuammi himself, risen in a strange resuscitation from his death-trance on a heap of corpses in a neighboring temple.

Ghastly indeed was his appearance, and the chill of horror deepened in the hearts of the multitude as they gave way before one who seemed to have come back from the dead.

Nuammi pressed forward to the very foot of the ascent to the altar, and, stretching forth his bloody arms, he said, in a deep and hollow voice,

"Listara! Listara! Thou hast taken the place which belonged to thy father, why hast thou preceeded me?"

Then, as if in the strength of the death struggle itself, he sprang upward. Both Tora and Sandelfon had turned to witness the strange spectacle, but before either of them could interpose the form of Nuammi had disappeared in the flames.

Sandelfon gazed after him a moment, with pale face and straining eyes, while utter silence fell upon the watching throng. Then he cried aloud,

"Farewell, oh, Tora, and you my people. Listara, my beloved, I come to thee! Nuammi, thou shalt not follow her alone!"

His motion forward toward the altar was checked by the arm of his father :

"Not yet, Sandelfon, doomed though thou art, thy time is not yet come, and it is not for thee to choose another day than that which is appointed."

The impulse had been strong, but it passed away, and the young giant yielded not less to the words of his father than to the grasp of steel that fell upon his shoulder.

"I will wait, my father, but I am weary of the lingering fate whose coming brings with it such darkness as this."

And Sandelfon pointed to the eddying volumes of smoke as they gathered high in air above the altar and poured down like a pall over the city.

"Greater darkness than this is coming," said Tora. "And now, go thou with me, for I have somewhat to say in thine own ear."

As they turned to leave the altar, it seemed as if with one accord the different temples began their solemn duty, and from every quarter fresh clouds of smoke arose to add their gloom to that from the altar of sacrifice.

Together into the temple went the High-priest and his son, nor did they pause or speak until Tora had closed behind them the massive door of his secret chamber.

Sandelfon gazed around him upon the simple but remarkable appointments of the room, but said nothing, until his father had seated himself. The light in the room was very nearly darkness, so deep was the gloom, and Tora seemed even larger than himself in the shadow.

"Be seated, Sandelfon."

The prince obeyed, and then, without other preface, his father began to declaim in full detail, the traditions and prophecies of their race. With many of these Sandelfon was already familiar, but, as the speaker gradually approached the present and the future, his interest deepened.

Hour after hour had passed, and the day in the outer world was drawing to a close. As yet Sandelfon had held his peace, but now he took advantage of a brief pause in his father's narrative, and said,

"All this, or nearly all, I have known for years, but I comprehend not why it is that the fates are against us, or why the end of our ancient race is drawing near."

"Neither do I know *why*," said Tora, "I only know that for ages the coming catastrophe has been foretold, even to the minutest particulars of its special phenomena. I myself, and thou, art but an instrument, and we can neither of us do otherwise than bow in silence to the inevitable decree."

"Oh, Tora, art thou indeed sure that the decree has gone forth."

"Does the sun rise and set? Do I not know from the records that for two thousand years all the conditions of existence upon this earth of ours have been steadily changing? Do I not know that it is less a home for me, and for such as I am, than it was even in my own boyhood, less than three hundred years ago? It is no longer a suitable dwelling-place for Vahtars, but rather a home for dwarfs like those whose carcasses now cumber the battle field of yesterday. Even the treason of Nuammi, with all its consequences was made known to me beforehand in the sacred parchments."

"Where are they?"

"Most of them I have destroyed, as thou shalt witness, but their contents will live so long as Tora exists."

"But what then?"

"Then there will be no further need of them, nor I shall survive even thee."

"Is the time long, my father?"

"Not long. But the day is waning, and I have many things to say and to shew to thee."

Even while he was speaking, the central lamp gave signs of returning life and in a moment more its strong and steady radiance filled the chamber.

"Sandelfon, the sun has set."

"How knowest thou?"

"The lamp of night burns not until the sun has ceased to shine upon the temples of the giants. Come, now, and I will show thee that which thou shalt never see again. I may need thy help, son."

And Tora and his son arose. The fire was now blazing brightly in the tripod, as if like the lamp, it was kindled afresh by the sunset, and Tora pressed upon it, one by one, the parchments which yet remained. That duty done he once more pressed his shoulder upon the granite door, and permitted Sandelfon to gaze upon the treasures of the crypt.

"What will become of these, my father?"

"I know not. I only know that I am bidden to leave them as they are. It may be that they are the destined fortunes of some dwarfs, in the ages that are to come. They will, at all events never know by whose hands these treasures were gathered, nor will any single arm among them suffice to swing back the door."

"Where go we now?"

"Follow me."

And Sandelfon silently walked onward behind his priestly sire as he left the inner chamber and strode through the damp and, gloomy corridors of the inner temple. At regular intervals dim lamps gave light enough to direct their steps, even when they descended stairways whose flight seemed endless.

At last, a rushing sound, as of many waters, greeted the ears of Sandelfon, and then he found himself on the edge of a precipice at the foot of which rolled and struggled and foamed the tide of a subterranean river. The blaze of hanging lamps shed a wierd glare over the tossing water and the walls of shining rock that rose on either side of it.

Piled on the margin of the precipice were untold treasures of gold and silver and gems, the gathered wealth of the dead ages, with piles of warlike gear, offensive and defensive, enough to have furnished forth all the ancient armies of the primeval giants.

Tora spoke no word of direction, but a significant gesture summoned Sandelfon to follow his example, as he began to hurl alike the treasure and the arms into the yawning abyss below.

Sandelfon noted that, so swiftly ran the water, even the ingots of gold were swept onward for an unknown distance before they sank beneath the mysterious flood.

The toil was long, and so severe that even the iron muscles of the young giant were weary of their unaccustomed strain when

the last golden helmet was hurled far from him into the seething torrent.

"And now, oh, Tora?"

"We have done well, but I have still somewhat to say to thee, follow me."

Again Sandelfon obeyed, while his father led him through vaulted passages and hidden ways, whose granite barriers at times required the utmost exertion of his own awful strength, and the young prince noted carefully the unmentionable secrets that were from time to time revealed to him in the solemn chambers through which he was passing;

At all events, when at last he returned with Tora to the chamber of counsel, Sandelfon had lost all disposition to be otherwise than blindly obedient to the dictates of his priestly father.

The lamp was still burning brightly, though the night was far spent.

"Sandelfon, my son?"

"Tora, my father."

"Thy next duty will be a more pleasant one, and thou mayest not see its reason, but it must be accomplished."

"I am ready."

"On the morrow thou wilt choose two valiant companions, and go southward, going where thou wilt, until thou hast seen what is done among the nations of the dwarfs, and why it is that they only are suited to the world which we are leaving. Thou wilt need thy two friends, but they will not return with thee. Thou wilt come back alone, and I will then explain to thee that which lies beyond."

Even in the oppressive solemnity of the inner chamber, Sandelfon bethought him of the golden collar of Chiaro, and his own promise to Listara, but he simply answered,

"I will go."

"And who with thee?"

"Poznar and Querotal, who fought better than all other Vah-tars in the battle of yesterday."

"They are good companions. And now thou wilt learn somewhat more. Sit thee down."

Sandelfon obeyed, and his father again heaped upon the coals

of the tripod fragments of golden incense, and before long both father and son were steeped in a mysterious slumber which was only broken by the going out of the "lamp of night," and the return of the tropical sun

CHAPTER IX.

THE JOURNEY OF THE THREE GIANTS.

No public ceremonials attended the departure of Sandelfon, but, at an early hour on the morrow, he and his two companions walked leisurely out through the western gate of the city of the giants, the splendor of their war dress concealed by the drapery of their upper robes of embroidered white wool.

Poznar and Querotal, though not taller, were more bulky than the Prince, and seemed well qualified to be the body-guard of the heir of the royalty of the giants.

Neither of them spoke, for a deep gloom settled over them, and, when they looked behind them, it was only to see how the dense clouds of smoke which still arose from the altar and the temples, covered like a cloud the city they were leaving.

Before them, for two or three days' journey, lay the region which had been the chosen home of the remnant of the giants, now only dotted here and there with the ruins of their cities or the heaps of ashes where their pleasant homes had been in the ages long gone by. The signs of former cultivation had disappeared or were disappearing, and forests were slowly lifting their leafy crowns over the once fruitful fields and gardens. All was beautiful enough, but all was fraught with mournful meaning to the souls of Sandelfon and his companions.

For three days the three giants traveled rapidly southward, caring little enough for rivers, whether deep or shallow, and scarcely noticing even the most dangerous of such wild beasts as from time to time they started from their lairs. Now, however, they were approaching a region into which no foot of any member of their race had intruded for centuries, so secluded and ex-

clusive had been their chosen policy, and here almost the recollection of them and their prowess had faded away.

On the fourth day, by order of Sandelfon, they deviated from their accustomed course, until they found themselves within hearing of the sound of the waves of the sea, and their wonderfully swift advance was bringing them rapidly nearer.

Suddenly, as they came out from under the trees into a leafy glade, the silence of the surrounding forest was awakened by a deafening roar, and, in another moment, a vast body came hurtling through the air, and Querotal suddenly found himself engaged in a struggle with an animal well worthy to cope with a descendant of the giant's.

Instead of coming to his assistance, Sandelfon restrained Poznar, saying.

"Let him alone, he will conquer. See now, what beasts there were in the world in the mighty days of old. This is the last, and the dwarfs will yet deny their very existence."

A splendid beast indeed! Very much in form, like an exaggerated puma, and of the same dull color, but possessing a majesty of size and bearing such as has not descended, even in small part, to any of the "cat kind," which are now to be found upon the continent of America.

Tall as was Querotal, his furry antagonist, with its hind feet on the earth and its fore-paws resting on his mail clad shoulders, was able to raise its angry head above his own, and well was it for the giant that his armor was of proof, and that even the sharp talons of the brute could make no impression upon the impenthrable bronze.

With marvellous power, Querotal withstood the awful pressure, and with the unflinching pluck of a true Vahtar he stood his ground, while he drove his long, broad dagger again and again into the vitals of his assailant, until the monster rolled backward upon the dead leaves in the agonies of death.

"Ah, what a robe we can make from that stretch of long brown fur," said Poznar.

"Not so," said Sandelfon, "we will leave him where he is, for he is the last of his race, and some day, in time to come, his bones will trouble the inquisitive dwarfs who may discover them.

Querotal, thou hast slain the last representative of the beasts that contested with our fathers the possession of the earth."

"Then I have done well," said Querotal, "and I thank you and Poznar for not interfering. Didst thou know that we should meet him?"

"Ask not. But I tell both thee and Poznar that there are strange things before us. Let us go forward."

And so they left the monster puma where he had fallen and marched on to the southward. Night came, and then day again and the darkness had called them to easy and careless slumber and the morning had again seen them resume their rapid progress.

The Vahtars, for all their immense size, were not large eaters, except upon festival occasions, and could go for many days without feeling the need of food, and they could move their huge bulks as rapidly, *in proportion to their size*, as can our best trained athletes and pedestrians.

It was towards noon of this day's travel that Querotal discerned, at a great distance before them, on the swampy plain in to which they had descended, something which to his far-seeing eyes towered above the horizon in the form of a gigantic tree.

"Sandelfon, my wise prince and leader, what is that yonder to the south?"

"Thou wilt see, shortly, for it is a part of our errand."

And so, as they hastened onward, they discerned more and more plainly that it was indeed a tree.

But such a tree!

It was of a species and genus unknown to the arborology of our day, but beside it the giant pines of California would themselves have seemed almost dwarfish; for full five hundred feet the tremendous trunk arose without a branch, and then sent out on every side arms of such magnificent spread that an army might have bivouacked in their shadow.

"And how is this a part of our errand?" asked Querotal.

"Because this is also a relic, the like of which shall no more appear upon the earth."

"Is this also the last?"

"There are no others precisely like, but some of an almost similar kind are now attaining their first growth not far from the

shores of the great western sea. They are to remain and puzzle the bewildered brains of the dwarfs that are to come."

"But what of this?"

"Wait and see."

Already they were within the shadow of the forest monarch, a sort of cedar, which stood alone in the middle of a marshy plain, as if all other trees had retired to a respectful distance, and in a few minutes more the three giants stood close to the grand trunk whose gnarled roots alone reduced them to even less than the stature of ordinary men in relative proportion.

"And now," said Sandelfon, "we have labor before us."

Labor indeed it was!

All the remainder of that day, and until the evening of the next, the three Vahtars toiled without cessation, bearing dead branches, and the dried fragments of fallen trees, and piling them in among the out-standing roots of the great tree, and up against its trunk. The labor was a severe one, but at last it was completed, and then, just as the sun was setting, the Prince took blazing knots of lightwood from a fire which he had prepared, and bade his comrades follow his example, while he set the several piles on fire as rapidly as possible.

At first the flames arose slowly, but, as the fire increased in heat and strength, the dancing tongues leapt upward, until the trunk was environed, and huge columns of smoke arose and eddied upward among the branches.

Not until morning, even then, did the fierce heat produce any perceptible effect, though the three giants labored all night long in feeding the fire. With the return of light, however, they could see that the flames had fairly penetrated the trunk itself, and that now, at last, not only smoke but fire was working upward toward the spreading branches.

During the long night, myriads of owls and other birds of darkness had come whirring down from their accustomed perches, but now, from among the upper branches arose winged creatures of a different character, and one, a condor of unrivalled spread of wings, and whose head was bald and featherless with centuries of age, as if the fire at the base of the ancient tree possessed some wierd and irresistible fascination, made no attempt

at any flight for escape, but after sailing grandly around in slowly decreasing circles, finally plunged madly in among the burning masses and was seen no more.

"A mighty bird," said Querotal.

"I have never seen her like, in all my days," said Poznar.

"No," said Sandelfon, "nor will any others ever see her like, for her mate is even now sitting faithfully upon the nest that will perish with its contents when this tree falleth, and they too are the last of their primeval race. They have no more business than have we in the world that is coming—that now is."

And now the three Vahtars withdrew from the immediate proximity of the fire whose heat forbade a near approach, even to throw on fresh fuel—and sat down upon a little knoll to await the result. Deeper and deeper the consuming fire penetrated in, to the heart of the vast trunk, for the wood and its resinous sap were highly combustible, and before the sun had reached the zenith the spreading crown of green foliage began visibly to totter. Still, it was well poised, and its pillar of support had been a strong one, and it was not until two hours later that the latter finally gave way.

Then there came a sound as of the snapping of the heartstrings of the earth, but root after root, charred and weakened by the devouring flame, released its hold, and the last of the primeval trees came thundering to the earth—nor even then did the stunned but still faithful condor abandon the ruined nest upon which he was waiting for his mate.

Even the three Vahtars held their breath in awe as they gazed upon their work.

To them, however, there were to be other results than the mere fall of a tree, however gigantic, for the crashing branches had disturbed the repose of the astonished denizens of the marshes, and sent forth those of them who did not perish, in swarms of panic-stricken or wrathful flesh and fowl.

Little the Vahtar trio would have cared for the wrath or fear of most of those who were disturbed by the falling tree, but, out of one deep and sluggish fen, not far from the hillock upon which they themselves were sitting, there slowly rose a shape which at

once claimed a sort of kindred with them, even in its present fearful threatening.

Not the snake which barred the way of the oriental conqueror, and all but defied his catapults, nor any other of the serpent race since the Pre-Adamite eras, could compare with the mighty Python that now rolled forth his awful convolutions over the yielding herbage. He was indeed fit to have coiled himself in the shade of the giant tree. Even Querotal was dismayed.

"Can we contend with him? Oh, my Prince?"

"Yes, for he too is the last of his race, and this is his day."

The Python had at once discovered his enemies, and rolled forward to assail them, his huge flat head raised high in air, and his jewel-like eyes blazing with venomous wrath, while his many colored sides glittered in the sunlight as if he had been clad in mail.

Poznor was about to draw his sword, when Sandelfon spoke.

"Thy spear, my friend, he must not come too nigh—there is no chance for sword play here."

Poznar obeyed, but even his immovable courage seemed to tremble as he poised his ponderous lance in air. It was not at all the fear of death, but the wonder of facing such an antagonist, that shook the iron nerves of the giant.

A moment only the spear quivered in the air, and then it sped, hurled with all the desperate energy of one whose life and honor were on the throw.

It was well cast, for it hurtled through the air with almost an invisible velocity, and smiting the Python midway between the green and glittering eyes, it all but disappeared from sight, so deeply was it buried in the skull and neck of the monster.

A convulsive shudder vibrated along the huge and muscular coils, and the scaly extremities lashed the earth for a moment in the death agony, and then the mighty serpent stretched himself out to his utmost length and all was still.

"Thou hast done well, Poznor," said Sandelfon, "this too was the last of that race of serpents which disputed with thy forefathers and mine the possession of the earth. It was ordained that they and we should leave it together."

"But we are yet here."

"We have yet other errands to perform. Let us go onward!"

And again the three Vahtars resumed their journey. Their work was in part accomplished, but we cannot here detail their experiences among a few scattered and barbarous tribes, we must rather precede them to the scene of their most important and most fatal mission.

CHAPTER X.

THE INCA'S DAUGHTER.

FAR away to the southward, in a broad and beautiful valley between two westward running spurs of the Andes, lay the original city of the Incas, incomparably more grand and beautiful than that upon which Pizarro, centuries later, laid his polluting and destroying hand. As yet it was a new creation, for the civilization of the subjects of the Incas had not yet lost the vigor or the polish which they had brought with them in their mysterious voyage across the seas from the all-producing shores of Asia "the mother of nations."

In the centre of the valley arose the walls and towers and clustering pinnacles of the city, and around it, upon the gentle slopes of the mountain-sides, the white walls of innumerable villas and palaces flashed back the rays of the newly risen sun.

In that earlier and purer day neither men nor women remained in slumber after the return of light, for only darkness could be an excuse for lethargy.

On the slope of the southern mountains, and about a mile from the city wall, there lay one palace which far exceeded all others not only in its architecture, but in the artistic perfections of its surroundings. There all the luxuriance of South American flowers and shrubbery had been trained to serve the ideal longings of a race of men whose tastes had neither been debased by corruption nor vitiated by the over-refinement—so-called—of a later and more artificial generation.

The sun was barely rising above the snowy summits of the dis-

tant ranges, though his light had preceeded him by an hour, and, beside the flower-bordered basin of a fountain, not far from the palace-villa which has been designated, there reclined in queenly solitude a form which was in perfect keeping with the luxuriant beauty which surrounded her.

Nothing but her majestic size, and something of eagle keenness in the glance of her large dark eyes, prevented her from being the very paragon of womanly perfection, but now she lay at full length, listlessly gazing into the fountain, and something of tender moisture gathered in her eyes and dimmed their brilliancy.

And now the coral lips opened :

"Chiaro, my brother, oh, my brother ! Why do you not return ?"

"Aye, Chiaro, why does he *not* return ? Is he not needed ?"

The second voice was cracked and unmelodious, and as the speaker toddled forward from among the orange trees, the beauty turned to look at the interloper.

He was a short, fat, pussy looking being, of, it might be, some fifty odd years of age.

"Yes, Chiaro, why is he not here ? These barbarous hordes are at our very door, and thy crazy brother is away with his best troops on this wild hunt after the city of the giants, and his fabulous Amazon."

"But, my father, he will return."

"And what good to us, if he only returns to find thy bones and mine blackening among the ashes of the city of the Incas. Thou shouldst have kept him at home."

"I keep him ?"

"Yes, *thou* ! He cared more for thy slightest word than for my sternest command."

As he spoke, the reigning Inca, for he was no less, attempted to assume a commanding attitude, but he was too near the edge of the basin of the fountain, and, as he put one foot backward in his somewhat theatrical essay, he stepped too far, and the next moment his wheezy bulk was floundering and spattering in the somewhat chilly water.

Gloomy as were her thoughts, Chiaro could not help laughing

as she sprang to the assistance of her sire, and dragged him once more out upon the grass.

The Inca was unharmed by his sudden bath, but the glories of his morning array were utterly demolished, and he gathered his bedraggled splendor about him and made the best of his way homeward, scolding, as he went, in the same breath, against the unlucky fountain and his absent son.

Left once more to herself, the mirthful expression steadily faded from the countenance of Chiara, and she resumed her melancholy meditations.

"Chiario, my brother, never was there such need of thy presence. Why art thou not here?"

So absorbed had she been, and so secure against any unauthorized intrusion upon her retirement, that she had hardly noticed the cracking of twigs and the rustling of the grass, and now she remained still in the quiet of unspeakable surprise, while a deep and musical voice, almost at her side, replied—

"Thy Chiario will not more return, but I am here in his place."

"And who art thou?" asked Chiara, as she bounded to her feet, and gathered her jewelled robe about her.

Well might she open wide her wondering, lustrous eyes, for it was Sandelfon himself who stood before her, in all the splendor of his mighty stature, his majestic beauty and his glittering arms.

He seemed to tower from the earth like a demi-god, and Chiara would have fled in fear, but that astonishment held her spell-bound upon the spot.

"Fear not," said the giant prince, "I will not harm thee, but I have news of thy brother."

"What, oh, what of my brother?"

"You will never see him more."

"Alas, then, he is slain?"

"In proof of my truth I bring you the token which he gave to me before his death."

And as Sandelfon spoke, he held forth the golden collar, whose gleaming gems seemed to shine only in mockery of the sad story to which they were bearing witness.

Chiara took the collar, and for a moment she even forgot, in her passionate grief, the all but miraculous presence before her.

Soon, however, she recalled her wandering senses, and checked her sobs. She asked.

"When and where did he fall?"

"Not many days since, in leading his troops against a people who had never harmed him, and who were too powerful for him to conquer."

"Thy people?"

"Mine."

"Ah, if they were all like thee, I can well believe that even Chiara's skill and courage must have been in vain."

Other questions Chiara asked, and at last became aware of the full extent of the misfortune which had befallen her and her people, and that neither her romantic brother nor any of the chosen warriors who had followed him in his wild search for the city of the giants, would ever more return to the city of the Incas.

"Alas, my brother! we shall miss thee indeed in this the hour of our danger."

"What danger?" asked Sandelfon.

Chiara explained to him that all the wild tribes of the mountains, and the southern wilderness, had banded themselves together against the Inca, and owing to the prolonged absence of her brother and their best troops, her father had been able to make but an imperfect head against them; especially as he himself was no warrior. The barbarians were even now encamped, not many miles away, exulting in the prospect of a new and easy triumph.

"Aye," said Sandelfon, "a city so badly guarded that I and my companions could walk, even in the night, without interruption, right into the palace of its monarch, may well be in danger. Is your father with his troops?"

"Nay, not so. He does but linger here and fret and scold in useless idleness. Oh, if my brother—" and here again the be-reaved beauty burst into passionate weeping.

The heart of the Vahtar Prince was touched with pity, and he almost regretted that he had so pitilessly slain the mad lover of Listara. So he said—

"Whatever thy name may be."

"I am Chiaro."

"Chiaro, the Inca's daughter, then, seeing that by my hand your armies have been deprived of a leader—"

"Was it by thine *own*?"

"By mine, but in fair battle, and I will at least take his place until I have scattered these swarms of wild dwarfs from before the city."

"Come, then, and see my father."

As Sandelfon turned to follow her, he made a signal to his friends, who had hitherto been hidden by the dense shrubbery, and the Inca's daughter shuddered to find that *three* gigantic forms, instead of one, stalked silently behind her as she hastened wards the palace.

As they came out of the gardens, and near to the house itself, there was a general scene of panic and commotion. Women shrieked and fled, and turned again, to watch, with overpowering curiosity, the approaching wonder, while even brave men felt the blood recede from their cheeks and the courage die within them.

It was soon evident to all, however, that their awful visitors were on friendly terms with Chiara, and they took heart again. The portals of the villa had been considered lofty and its rooms magnificent, but the Valtar prince had to bow his crest as he entered, and the grand reception room looked small and mean when he and his two companions stood upon its polished floor.

The pudgy old Inca had by this time replaced the robes which had been ruined by his unintentional bath, that morning, and was soon enthroned in due state to receive his wonderful visitors with their sad news and their friendly offer. His grief for the loss of his son was more than a little tempered by his royal wrath at hearing of the disastrous termination of the young leader's expedition, and this in turn gave way to a fresh gush of exulting hope as to what his dismayed and shattered army might yet accomplish, if led by such miracles of warlike promise as those who stood before him.

The courtiers and attendants of the Inca had crowded into the

reception hall, and joined heartily in the feeling expressed by their dumpy but worthy sovereign. Perhaps in all the throng there was but one who looked upon the benignant countenance of the Vahtar prince with any other emotion than admiration and wonder, to which something of gratitude for promised help may have been added.

But there was one, after all, in whose dark soul there was nothing but bitterness, as he saw Chiara lead forward the splendid form of Sandelfon. Small as she looked beside her mighty companions, Chiara's native dignity prevented her from appearing diminutive, even when Sandelfon unconsciously stroked her flowing hair, while he was speaking to the Inca.

Whatever ceremonies may ordinarily have been in use for those who approached the Inca, the prince of the primeval race would have laughed at the idea of himself observing them, and he freely addressed his august host, as one king talking to another, if not indeed, at times, like a superior talking to a very respectable inferior. To Chiara, however, his tone and manner were admiring and half caressing, for the heart of the kindly prince smote him more and more on account of her brother, whom he had slain, and he was moved with sorrow for the pale cheeks and tearful eyes of the beautiful princess. All this, however, as he interpreted it, did but still further inflame the jealous heart of Fetzal, the priest of the sun, himself of the line of Incas, and whose place should have been at the head of the army in Chiara's stead, but that he knew, and all other men as well, that the heart of a leader did not beat beneath the jewelled robe of the gloomy faced priest. Moreover, he had taught himself, without a warrant from the lips of Chiara to look upon the Inca's daughter as his own property, and this day he had been half glad to learn the death of her brother, for the young Inca had ever despised his unwarlike cousin.

Swift and black and cowardly was then the hatred which Fetzal conceived against the wonderful warrior who thus came to not only assume the command of the army, but even to claim sudden friendship with the Inca's beautiful daughter. Whatever he felt, however, he was "priest" enough to dissemble, and he was one of the foremost of those who crowded to the side of

Sandelfon, after the conclusion of the Inca's somewhat tiresome address of welcome and thanks.

The Vahtars were half amused and half annoyed, as they looked about them upon the gaping dwarfs who gazed upward upon their marvelous proportions.

"And will the earth, oh Sandelfon," asked Querotal, "be given up to such as these?"

"So says my father. It is fitted for them, and they for it, and they multiply exceedingly."

"They are not all contemptible," said Poznar, "if the princess yonder could but grow a few spans taller, she would remind me of Nuammi's daughter, Listara, only she is not so beautiful."

Sandelfon trembled at the mention of Listara's name, but he said nothing in reply, only he glanced keenly into the face of Chiara, and she blushed crimson at the sudden intensity and fire of the giant's gaze.

Short time, in spite of all urging, did the Vahtar Prince and his friends stay for rest or refreshment, they had work before them, and they were in haste to do it.

Even while they were engaged in this brief repose, however, swift-footed couriers had gone on to prepare the army for the three wonderful strangers, so that all was made ready for their reception, and when at last Sandelfon and his friends, followed at some distance by the Inca and his slow-traveling court, strode in through the wide swung gates of the city, housetops and windows and streets swarmed with astonished gazers, in such numbers that the somewhat cynical Querotal observed,

"This is an anthill."

"Much like one, Querotal," said Poznar, "but these are remarkable ants, and they have built their hill well."

"And we," said Sandelfon, "who thus look down upon their insignificance, are passing away before them, in spite of our pride of strength and stature."

"I am not bitter," said Querotal, "but I am by no means sorry of this battle, which will give us a chance to crush out a few of these dwarfish imitations. Let us, I pray you, lose no time in reaching what they call their army."

"We will not," said Sandelfon, and so the three made no pause

whatever in the city, but stalked on through it, on the line of its main thoroughfare, the crowds precipitately giving away before them on either side as they went.

Sandelfon even disdained to summon reinforcements from the swarms of able-bodied men around him.

"They are not warriors, it is likely, and would only be in the way. Moreover, we ourselves will be reinforcement enough."

And so indeed it proved. When, a few hours later, the three giants arrived at the edge of a moderate elevation, affording a view of the plain on which the insufficient and badly managed army of the Inca had turned at bay in its retreat, and attempted to make a stand against the fast gathering hordes of the barbarous tribes, Sandelfon saw at a glance that he had not come up a moment too soon. Even though the news of the wonderful strangers had so far encouraged the troops that they had consented to face their wild assailants again, they were not doing so with any spirit, and here and there they were falling into that confusion which is the sure presage of defeat.

Sandelfon glanced over the field with the eye of a general, and his conclusions were made at once.

"Querotal, go thou and rally those fellows on the right, and bid them charge at once. Poznar, take those reserves with thee to the left, and attack with the whole line. I will lead the centre. The word is, 'Attack without ceasing and slay without pity.'"

As the glittering three moved downward along the hillside, they at once attracted the wondering gaze of both friends and enemies, and a great shout of joyful reassurance arose among the soldiers of the Inca, while a corresponding feeling of dismay fell upon the barbarians, when they saw that these three awful beings had come to the assistance of their foes. And yet, for a brief space, the wild men held their ground, fighting with desperate courage, but now they found that not only giant strength and terrific individual destructiveness, but skill and leadership also, had been added to the forces of the Inca.

Then the strong superstitions of their own hearts arose against them, and they said one to another,

"It is in vain to fight against the gods themselves, let us save ourselves while we can."

Tribe after tribe broke and fled in wild confusion, vainly striving to shun the slaughtering swords that never paused for an instant, as the eager giants pressed wrathfully upon their rear.

Shall it be said that for once Sandelfon forgot his usual kindness of nature, and felt a fierce pleasure in slaying? It was indeed so, for there was a fiery jealousy in his heart against these dwarfs who were to inherit the world which his own proud race was leaving, and he swept onward with his huge two-handled blade, smiting right and left, with terrible results. The soldiers of the Inca also avenged themselves for previous defeat and loss, and it was likely to be many a long day before the barbarians should again gather to face the armies of the "people of the sun."

While the battle was still raging in all its fierceness, many of the people arrived from the city to witness it, so certain had they felt of the success of their new allies, and among these was Chiara herself, who had now an opportunity of witnessing the irresistible prowess before which her unfortunate brother had gone down.

"Alas, poor infatuated Chiaro!" she murmured, "What madness to have measured arms like thine with an army of demi-gods!"

And yet these same demi-gods were only too soon to learn that they too were only mortal.

CHAPTER XI.

THE POISONED CHALICE.

ON the day following the decisive battle which had saved the city of the Incas, there was a grand banquet in the great hall of the palace of the Inca himself, and Sandelfon and his friends were the guests of the occasion, honored above all others.

Querotal and Poznar had been consigned to the good offices of

the Priest of the Sun, and, but a little above them, sat Sandelfon, in friendly equality with the Inca and his daughter.

The joyful festivities were at their height, and no cloud had as yet appeared to mar the general good feeling and triumphal enjoyment, when Fetzal half arose and beckoned to an attendant, holding forth at the same moment a golden bowl which sparkled with a foaming and most enticing liquid.

"This to the Hero. The priest of the sun would join him in the blood of the vine."

The servant bore the golden chalice to the hands of Sandelfon, but the Prince of the Vahtars held it but an instant before his face.

"Many thanks to your priest, or whatever he may be, but the juice of the grape is tainted. It is too long since it was expressed, and no member of the primeval race has ever stooped to swallow such a swine's draught as this."

And, so saying, Sandelfon, with a gesture of contempt, poured out upon the floor the contents of the goblet with which the jealous Fetzal would have betrayed him. Well would it have been if his example had been earlier given for the benefit of his companions, for even as he returned the golden chalice to the hands of the pale but obsequious attendant, while the dark face of Fetzal grew white with disappointed wrath, Querotal arose slowly in his place and said,

"Poznar, we stay too long with these pigmies, let us go."

But Poznar answered not.

Still in his chair sat the mighty warrior of the Vahtars, and Querotal all but mechanically resumed his seat beside him. For a moment the latter attempted to look in the face of his friend, and then he too grasped the carved arms of his festal throne, and swiftly became as cold and rigid as his comrade.

No part of all this by-play had been lost by the keen and watching eyes of Sandelfon, for had not Tora foretold to him this feast and its consequences?

Now, however, springing to his feet, he once more drew from its sheath the blade which had led the armies of the Inca to victory, and it seemed but an instant beor the banquet hall was

flooded with the gore of those who fell beneath the avenging wrath of the royal Vahtar.

Well he knew that no art of his could avail to arouse his unfortunate friends, and he thought alone of vengeance.

The pudgy Inca toddled away through a private passage, the courtiers, such as escaped the lightning passes and sweeps of the long blade of Sandelfon, fled shrieking through the halls and corridors, and soon the angry and revengeful giant was left alone?

No, not quite in solitude, for before him on the marble floor knelt the form of Chiara.

"Wilt thou slay me, also?"

'No, not thee. I have slain thy false priest, and, it may be, some others—what signifies a score or more of dwarfs—but I have not at all avenged my brethren. They have fallen by base cunning and not by the sword—but I will give them a fitting burial. Take care of thyself, Chiara."

So saying, Sandelfon took from their golden sockets, one after another, the huge torches with which the hall of the banquet had been illuminated, and with them he swiftly ignited everything inflammable which was presented, either by the furniture of the hall or the wood work of the building. It was but a few moments before all was in a bright and fast increasing blaze.

Still the stony figures of the two Vahtars sat in their chairs at the head of the table, while around on the marble slabs were scattered the ghastly tokens of Sandelfon's avenging prowess.

"This is all I can do for thee, oh, Poznar! This is not the temple of thy kindred, my friend Querotal, but there will be abundant fire at the burial, and no lack of blood to honor the ashes of two heroes of the old race. I bid you farewell, for I must go hence to seek my own fate. Would I could find it here!"

As he finished speaking, Sandelfon turned to leave the building, but there before him, still kneeling upon the gory pavement, was the now half unconscious form of Chiara.

"Thou art beautiful," muttered the giant, "and thou hast done no harm to me or mine."

And so saying he raised her, like an infant, in his powerful arms, and bore her out from the now blazing palace. Crowds

of the citizens, amazed and panic stricken, were already gathering outside, but none of them dreamed of hindering the passage of the giant and his lovely burden, for they looked upon him as their deliverer—their mighty benefactor—and regarded his exit from the burning building, with such a load, as but another evidence of his benignant agency. And so, uninterrupted, Sandelfon made his way towards the white-walled villa on the mountain side, nor did he pause until he had put Chiara safely down by the side of the fountain where her reclining form had first attracted his exploring eyes. Up to this time she had seemed almost unconscious, but now a glow of returning life appeared upon her marble cheeks.

“Sandelfon?”

“What is it, Chiara?”

“Dost thou leave me?”

“Leave thee? I leave also the charred bones of my comrades. Thy dwarfs have returned me now evil for evil, forgetting the good, and I must return to my own.”

“Thy own? And where?”

“What is that to thee?”

“More than thou knowest.”

“Let it then be as little as may be, for, beautiful as thou art, thou hast no more lot than had thy brother with the race of the ancient giants.”

Chiara's lips trembled, and her cheeks glowed with a burning flush, but her voice refused her utterance, and before she could recover herself the Vahtar Prince had disappeared in the forest.

From the city on the plain below her, Chiara could see the smoke arising from the burning palace, and she shuddered as she recalled the scene in the banquet hall, but then she thought in whose mighty arms she had been borne away, and a thrill of undefinable pleasure came over her.

“Can it be that he is human? Yes, for the death of his comrades shows that the race of the giants is only mortal.”

And Chiara covered her face with her robe and sat down by the side of the fountain to dream of the far away city before whose mysterious walls her brother had fallen.

Meantime, almost forgetting all that was past in his haste to

learn that which was yet before him, Sandelfon pressed rapidly northward on his homeward way. If he had ever doubted the authority of the ancient prophecies, his doubts were now utterly dispelled, and he was prepared for a blind obedience to the future commands of Tora. Although there was no fear that any pursuit could or would overtake his swift footsteps, he sped on like one who is flying from an enemy.

Nor was his homeward journey without its full share of incident, but we cannot stop to detail that which occurred to him.

Days passed, and once more Sandelfon stood, in the gray light of morning, on the mountain side above the city of his ancestors, gazing anxiously at the smoke-clouds which still ascended from the temples.

The altar alone seemed cold and deserted.

"Alas! Tora must be right, and there will now be no cessation until the end!"

"Tora was right, my son, though he knew not in what manner the curse would come."

"Thou here, my father?"

The prince had started in surprise at the voice of the high priest, who had approached him unheard, so deep had been his absorption.

"I am here. I have been awaiting thy return. Thou art alone. Was all according as it was written?"

"Yes, all was true."

"Thou hast seen, then, a city of dwarfs?"

"I have seen, and they are a wonderful people."

"My son, these whom thou hast seen are few and weak and foolish in comparison to the wise and wicked multitudes that shall cover the earth in the days that are to come."

"Will they be all evil?"

"Not all, but when the good among them are all dead, ages hence, these too shall pass away, like the race which they are supplanting."

"Will they remember aught concerning us?"

"No, and yet, yes. But of that thou shalt know more hereafter."

"I will wait. But why, oh, Tora, is all this burning among the temples?"

"A pestilence arose from the field of battle, and came into the city on the day after your departure."

"Were the victims many?"

"So many that the survivors are too few to attend the temple furnaces. Neither woman nor child is left, and the royal race of the Vahtars is very near its end."

Even the marble features of Tora betrayed emotion as he made this announcement; but, instead of grief, there arose in the grand face of Sandelfon a new light, as if he discovered something of sombre glory in being thus chosen to witness the long foretold and expected consummation of the ancient times.

Tora was silent for a moment, and then he said,

"I am glad to see, my son, that thou art ready in thy mind, for we have yet much to see, to do, and to endure. Let us go to the city."

The enthusiastic feeling must have been indeed strong in the bosom of Sandelfon, for he did not seem to be affected by the mournful solitude which greeted him as he and his father passed through the unguarded gates.

"Thou seest now, Sandelfon?"

"Yes, and I believe. But what is to be our next duty?"

"Much has been performed already, for the pestilence has spent its force, and we have toiled without ceasing. We must see to it that we leave no record of ourselves in the city of our fathers."

"We cannot destroy these stones?"

"No, but the dwarfs will find nothing in or on them which will tell the secrets of the primeval race."

"But our arms and tools?"

"Water will hide these, and the fire and the corroding tooth of Time, the destroyer, will do all else that is required."

The few Vahtars that remained, about a hundred in number, now gathered to welcome their returning Prince, but even Sandelfon was astonished to see the expression of cheerfulness, even of enthusiasm, which appeared on all faces. Nor did they trouble him with questions, for Tora said to them in a loud voice,

"All has been fulfilled, as I have told you."

All that day, and the next, and the next, were consumed in gathering everything metallic that could be found in the city of the giants. Even the battle field was searched, and no stray fragment was permitted to remain upon it.

As the collections were made, they were deposited at the door of the temple, and were swiftly borne by Tora and his son to the margin of the subterranean torrent whose concealing waters were to receive them.

Only the living men retained their own arms and armor,—all the rest was irrecoverably hidden.

On the morning of the fourth day, Tora said to his followers,

"The water has done its work, and now we must call fire to our assistance."

As he ordered, so it was done, and before noon every structure in and about the city which was at all combustible, in part or in whole, was wrapped in consuming flames, while the remnant of the Vahtars, arrayed as if for battle, marched steadily out upon the road to the North, neither looking to the right hand nor to the left, nor did they pause for so much as a glance back at that which they were leaving, but pressed steadily onward until they had gained such a distance that not even the smoke of the burning city could have been distinguished in the southern horizon.

Then spoke Tora :

"Sandelfon, my son, we will rest here, for even *we* are weary."

There, then, the giants rested for days, eating and sleeping, and talking over that which had been and that which was to be, for they were preparing for a long and eventful journey, well knowing that they would not any of them ever retrace their steps which they should take in the direction of the North Star.

Every man, however, seemed to vie with his neighbor in cheerfulness, and the camp of rest was a very pleasant place to be in.

CHAPTER XII.

THE AZTEC BRIDAL.

EACH day at noon, Sandelfon would arouse himself and stroll out into the surrounding forest as if to commune with himself, but now and then his thoughts would go back to the past rather than forward to the future. He would recall his stolen hours of love with Listara, and dream over her wonderful beauty—he could even thrill again with sorrowful admiration as he remembered her heroism on the battle field, and her last heroic devotion at the altar of sacrifice.

But one day, when he had gone farther than usual from the camp, he seemed to be able to think of nothing but his strange and fatal trip to the city of Incas, and as he recalled its adventures, he could but think how lovely a burden he had borne from the blazing banquet hall, and how exceedingly beautiful she had appeared as he laid her down upon the margin of the fountain, and he said aloud.

“Ah, Chiara, indeed, thou wert very beautiful!”

Even as he uttered the words, Sandelfon heard a quick, sharp exclamation, from the midst of a cluster of flowering shrubs, but a few paces distant, and as he turned at the sound, no less a person than the Inca's daughter herself stepped forward to meet him.

“Sandelfon, I am here,”

“Thou! And wherefore?” and the face of the prince expressed the most unbounded astonishment.

“I have followed thy footsteps for many days, and now I have found thee. The city was in ruin, but I saw the track of thy feet among those that were pointed northward.”

“But why did you come?”

“That I know not. True, I was in trouble and danger at home, but I only know that I *must* follow you.”

“Were you not afraid?”

“Yes, I have been in danger of wild beasts and wild men, and I have so suffered from my exposure and fatigue that you will hardly call me now Chiara the beautiful.”

The maiden did, indeed, show fearful signs of her long journey and its perplexities, but she was no soft, effeminate child of our modern civilization, and she had borne all remarkably well, so that Sandelfon said, as he unceremoniously gathered her in his arms, and strode off in the direction of the camp,

"Beautiful thou art, and since thou hast joined thy lot with ours we will receive thee well."

Not even by the coming of Chiara did Tora seem in the least degree surprised, merely saying,

"Now we can leave our camp of rest on the morrow; I have been waiting for this, and wondered why she did not come."

Sure enough, in the early morning, the Vahtars were once more on their way, but as the Inca's daughter could never have kept pace with them, she was borne aloft in a sort of litter, swung from the shoulders of two of her mighty protectors.

Strange indeed was her position, but she felt satisfied, especially when Tora or his son were walking near or talking with her. The strangest of all was that she felt sure that it was *not love* which compelled her to follow the fortunes of Sandelfon, and at last she gathered courage to ask,

"Oh, Tora, the mighty and the wise, canst thou tell me whither I am going?"

"Not yet, my daughter, I can tell thee only that thou hast nothing to fear, and that thy heart may be at ease over thy fate."

"I am content," said Chiara.

And now the wanderers were fast approaching the borders of that ancient kingdom, then in its infancy, over which the great Quetzalcoatl, in after centuries the god of Mexican idolatry, was then reigning in all his glory.

From the slope of the tall mountains to the southward they looked down upon the unrivaled valley of Mexico, and then pushed forward towards the city, even in that early day wonderful for its beauty and its garden-like surroundings.

Nor was their coming unexpected, for many a startled mountaineer had looked out from his covert in fear and wonder at their small yet terrible array, and had then sped forward with all his

swiftness to warn his countrymen that the gods themselves had come to Anahuac.

Even Quetzalcoatl felt for a moment unaccustomed tremors of apprehension, and ordered the gates to be closed, while he summoned his priests and his wise men to inquire of them the meaning of the approaching prodigy. Brief, but anxious, was the council, for already the people on the wall could discern the glittering line that was swiftly sweeping down the mountain side,—but the unanimous voice of the wise men was to open the gates.

“If they are mortals, so small a band can be better dealt with whether in peace or war, among the tangled streets of the city, and if they be more than mortals, our walls will be in vain to stop their onward march. And so the monarch of Anahuac threw open wide the portals of his capital, and waited in solemn state the solution of the mystery.

Meantime, as Tora strode onward by the side of the litter which carried the Inca’s daughter, he slowly raised his arms and pointed to the city.

“Chiara, yonder is thy destination—thou wilt go no further.”

“And thou?”

“Thou wilt need our protection no more, and we shall leave thee.”

“Sandelfon? All?”

“Aye, all, for thou hast no part, for good or evil, in the fortunes of the royal race of the Vahtars.”

Chiara said no more. but her eyes wandered, with a somewhat troubled expression, to the splendid form of the Prince, as he marched in front of the battalion.

No opposition met them as they advanced into the city, and the giants went forward without hesitation.

It seemed almost as if the city had been previously familiar to Sandelfon, so directly did he lead his small but imposing column in the direction of the great palace of Quetzalcoatl.

The multitudes that began to gather on either side, when they saw no evidence of any hostile intention, could but wonder quite as much at the “all at home” bearing of their giant visitors as at their size and armor.

On went the Vahtars, nor did they pause until they had passed the great gates of the palace, which indeed seemed made for the reception of such as they, and, ascending with measured tramp the lofty stairway, marched on in slow procession into the grand "Hall of Judgment," where Quetzalcoatl, first ruler of the united Aztec Empire, sat with his counselors, as if waiting for their approach.

Then indeed the wise men began to tremble, as they and their prince were evidently in the power of their mailed and gigantic visitors, but the monarch of the Aztecs was no common man, and he arose from his throne and tendered a respectful welcome to his terrible guests.

He spoke but a few words, but they were uttered with a dignity of fearless kingliness that became him well. He concluded,

"And now may I ask to what fortunate chance we owe this visit from such wonderful and powerful beings."

"My answer will be brief," said Tora, as he made one vast stride forwards. "It is not for you to know who we are, whence we came, or whither we are going, but we have brought from the far south the Daughter of the Sun to be Queen of the Aztecs, as the bride of Quetzalcoatl."

As he spoke, Tora signalled with his hand, and four tall Vahtars brought forward the litter of Chiara, and, as she stepped forth and stood before the throne of the monarch, the face of Quetzalcoatl changed color and trembled visibly.

"It is indeed," said he, "the face that has haunted me in my dreams, and I will ask no more."

The effect upon Chiara was even more manifest, and but for the sustaining hand of Tora she would have fallen, for to her own memory the warlike beauty of the Aztec king was a revelation and a fulfilment, and she recognized at once that her guiding influence had but directed her aright.

"Thou wilt wed her, oh king?" asked Tora.

"When thou wilt."

"Now and here."

"Call then the priests, and bid them prepare the altar," said the monarch to his courtiers.

"Not so," said Tora. "I am myself high priest, and it will be wedding enough when I tell thee thou art *bound*. Lay off thy crown and come hither."

Quetzalcoatl obeyed and came forward until he stood on the left of the royal giant, while Chiara stood upon his right. At a word from Tora, the hands of the two were joined, and never did a more magnificently beautiful pair stand before any marriage altar than this that now gazed deep into one another's eyes at the head of the great Aztec Hall of judgment.

Something Tora said, in a deep and hollow voice, as he bent majestically above them, seeming as he did so like a living embodiment of authority, but none present could comprehend the sonorous gutturals.

Then, with closed eyes, the Vahtar high-priest laid his massive hands upon them and said—

"The ancient race will be seen no more, and I bid thee now and be fruitful and multiply, until the day when it in its turn shall attain its fate and reach the hour of its final disappearing. Quetzalcoatl, *thou art bound*."

The Aztec monarch bowed low in reverent awe, and then, leading forward his bride, he placed her beside him upon the throne which, up to that hour, no other had been called to share with him.

Sandelfon gazed upon the scene as if in a dream, for he was only thinking of his lost Listara, and imagining solemn wedding ceremonies which the fate of his race had forever forbidden him.

"My son," said Tora, "our errand here is accomplished; we will go. Arouse thyself."

"Go," interrupted Quetzalcoatl, "wilt thou not stay for the wedding feast?"

"Not so," said Tora, "no feast may stay us from that which is before us. We will go."

Chiara herself pleaded with tearful earnestness that her mysterious protectors would not so soon depart, but the royal priest was inexorable, and, as steadily and as silently as they had entered, the Vahtars closed up their glittering ranks and marched out of the palace and on through the city, leaving it by the gate which opened towards the North.

The crowds of people who gathered to witness their departure looked on them with bated breath, not knowing as yet what had been the meaning of this seemingly supernatural visitation

"Whither now?" asked Sandelfon.

"Thou wilt see, in due time, but we have many a long day's journey before us, ere we cease to march onward towards the unchanging star of the North"

CHAPTER XIII

THE WESTERN SEA, AND THE GIANT TREE.

Up to this time there had been no break in the ranks of the Vahtar wanderers, and all who had left the city of the giants still marched on behind their priest-prince and his son, still maintaining the semblance of enthusiastic purpose with which they had started.

Now, however, they were warned by Tora that the days of their mortality were drawing nearer, though this did not seem in any way to interfere with their cheerful bearing, for the primeval race made no account of either life or death.

One stupid tribe of the descendants of Adam, among the mountains of what is now northern Mexico, attempted to stay the progress of the Vahtars, and refused to be convinced of their folly until the swarming thousands with which they had assailed the mail clad strangers had been reduced to a pitiful remnant. Here, however, after sinking their now useless armor in a neighboring quicksand, the Vahtars buried ten of their number.

"Why not then fire, my father?" asked Sandelfon.

"There is neither altar nor temple here, my son," replied Tora, "nor is it so bidden me. Some day the digging dwarfs will find the bones of those whom we have covered in the earth, and will measure them, and then they will be proud of the wisdom with which they will decide that these cannot be bones because no dwarf could ever have owned them."

"Will they deny the evidence of their own eyes?"

"Yes, and with reason, since in that day they will have been accustomed to mutual deceit, and their eyes will have become no more of any use in distinguishing between truth and falsehood."

"A pitiful race indeed!"

Onward from the scene of this encounter, over mountains, through dark and awful forests, and across hot deserts, marched the Vahtars. The sands of the desert claimed a tribute of three stalwart bodies, and there they and their weapons may be found some day, but as yet the wilderness has been true to its trust.

They were tending now to the westward, as well as to the northward, and after many days they came out from among the rugged passes of the mountain, and found themselves on the shore of a great water, to which their own far-seeing eyes could discover no boundary.

"This is the western sea," said Tora, "and across it came our fathers, in the days when the earth was young. Beyond it, towards the setting sun, is the great birthplace of nations."

"Did the dwarfs come thence?"

"Aye, all the nations of the earth, old or young, and there this day the dwarfs are swarming in uncounted multitudes, as they will one day swarm over the ground whereon we are standing. And now let us go down, for we will bathe, as did our forefathers, in this great sea of the West."

A few hours' walking brought them to the sandy beach, and, without further hesitation or ceremony, they followed their chief-tain into the tossing surf. The cool brine imparted fresh vigor to their travel-worn limbs, and some of them ventured far out from shore among the billows. With these was Sandelfon, and as with sinewy arms he buffeted the billows, shouting to his followers, he saw, first one, and then another of them, suddenly disappear beneath the foaming waters.

"To the shore!" he ordered, in a voice that might have been heard by the most distant of the swimmers. "To the shore, for we have paid our tribute to the western sea."

Himself set the example, and in a few moments more the giants were drawn up along the beach, waiting to see what the ocean would do with the bodies of their companions. Long hours they

lingered, but the pitiless tide held fast that which it had swallowed.

"It is enough," said Tora, "Herein is an answer, and we must now bend our footsteps towards the rising sun. All is as it was foretold in the ancient writings."

"Our numbers are beginning to diminish," said Sandelfon.

"They are still enough for that which remains," said Tora. "And now I will show you a relic of the olden times."

And so the Vahtars lingered no longer by the shore of the western sea, but left their vanished comrades in their eternal burial place, while they turned their own footsteps once more inland.

One night they slept and rested, and the next they gave themselves up to a grand hunt, for Tora bade them prepare provisions for a march.

Their hunt could scarcely be in vain, and in two days more they were ready for their march. They started at early dawn, and before noon Sandelfon saw in the distance before him the semblance of a forest which put him in mind of the tree which he and his two friends had burned among the southern morasses.

Nearer and nearer they drew, until at last they stood in the edge of the grove, and, giants though they were, they looked up in all but speechless awe at the huge bulks which towered away above them.

Three hundred, four hundred, and even five hundred feet from the bare earth arose the enormous stems, with wide intervals between them, and here and there were younger members of the same family whose few centuries of growth had not yet brought them much above the average height of the taller forest trees of the adjacent mountains.

"Seest thou these, my son?" said Tora. "There are many such in these regions, and some of them will remain."

"Some of these?"

"Not of these older trees. They are nearly at the expiration of their time and they will fall, but it is written that of the seeds which fall from these younger saplings in their old age, others

shall grow that shall be standing in the days when we and our works are utterly forgotten or denied.

"What will men say?"

"They will call them only trees of vast size, not seeing any history or memorial in their massive trunks, and they will cut them down for base uses of their own."

"A pitiful people!"

"Pitiful indeed! And yet a wise and a mighty race of dwarfs, against whom even our ancient prowess would avail us not."

"Too strong for us?"

"Not that, indeed, but they will be dwellers in a world which will then belong to them, as it once belonged to the Vahtars."

"But have we aught to do with these?"

"Nothing, except that here too we shall leave memorials of our presence."

"How so?"

"Thou shalt see."

And, as he spoke, Tora turned to his followers and gave the word to move onward, but a voice from the ranks replied—

"Oh, Tora, I am weary! Let us rest awhile."

"Aye, let us rest!" said several voices, and their leader answered—

"We will rest."

Never before had any similar complaint been made by Vahtar warriors, and the other giants gazed at their leader and in each other's faces in astonishment, but they sat down under the shadow of the trees. To most of them the pause was an irksome one, but before long they discovered that four of their number had seemingly fallen into a deep and helpless slumber, from which all efforts to awaken them were unavailing.

"Disturb them not!" said Tora.

Hours went by, and the sleepers did not awaken, and at last when Sandelfon himself stooped over them to ascertain the cause of their lethargy, he was startled to find that their bosoms gave no signs of life, while the marble itself was not more still and rigid than the cold brows of the motionless warriors.

"They are dead!" he cried. "Oh, Tora, they are dead!"

"Aye, they have but chosen to rest forever in the shadow of the primeval trees, and we will leave them where they lie."

"Shall we not bury them?"

"Not so, lest when the dwarfs cut down the trees they also dig below the surface. Let them lie."

And so, with many a curious and half regretful glance at the sleeping forms of their late comrades, the remaining giants once more arose and resumed their march. Devoted as they were, and fully prepared in mind for the solemn fate before them, the Vah-tar warriors would have been more than mortal if they could have shut their minds to the deep sense of awe that came to them as, one after another, they witnessed the literal fulfilment of the announcements of their high-priest and leader.

The gigantic forest trees gradually disappeared in the western horizon, and still the surviving giants pressed onward towards the east.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE JOURNEY OF THE GIANTS.

A DAY or two more, and they found themselves climbing from crag to crag, towards the summit of one of the central mountain ranges. Already they had passed the ultimate bounds of vegetation, except that here and there the starved lichens clung to the rocks, while above them lay the regions of perpetual frost and snow. The Vahtar warriors, accustomed only to tropical heats and the unbroken summer of the sacred city, felt the increasing cold severely, and at last Sandelfon spoke—

"Oh, Tora, my father, is there no pass, through which we can escape this ascent into the snows?"

"Yes, my son, there are many such, but they are not for us. The mountains also claim tribute of the primeval race."

"How so?"

"Thou wilt see. Wait."

And so the Prince and his comrades climbed on after their wiewed and prophetic chieftain.

As they at last found themselves struggling among drifts and glaciers whose frigid surface knew no summer melting time, one after another of the giants began to feel the effects of the increasing cold, and complained of drowsiness.

"May we not rest, oh Tora, even here, among these awful summits?"

"Aye, but not yet."

And so they climbed on, but when the summit was actually reached, and around them, and behind and before, they could discern no elevations upon which they could not look down from their own lofty standing-place, three of the giants slowly sank upon the earth, in that uncontrollable slumber which is the gift of exceeding cold.

"We must not delay here," said Tora, "lest the mountains claim us all."

"Shall we not rest?" asked Sandelfon.

"Not here, for rest here is death. We must descend at once."

Sandelfon pointed to the sleepers, and replied,

"But what of these? I have tried in vain to awaken them."

"They will never wake more. Disturb them not, but leave them where they lie. Let us make haste, or these three will have company. It is written that we may not linger on the mountain summit."

And so, the giants, weary as they were with the tedious and perilous ascent, started at once upon the not less difficult task of descending into the plains below.

The cold decreased, however, as they went downward, and their huge lungs found the air more expansive and less trying.

It may be that some climbing dwarfs will yet venture upon the heaven-kissing crag where the eternal frosts still holds the three giants in the slumber which the ages have not yet disturbed.

On went the Vahtars through the broken plains, and other

ranges of mountains were crossed through passes whose topography seemed mysteriously familiar to Tora.

At last they reached the borders of a desert, whose dreary waste of rocks and sand stretched out before them to the horizon.

"And must this also be crossed?" asked Sandelfon.

"Aye, for here too we have a duty to perform."

"And what is that?"

"To-morrow thou wilt see."

On into the desert marched the surviving Vahtars, in all the glory of their warlike pomp, and that night they slept upon the sand.

Before they had marched far on the following day, they saw in the distance before them what seemed to be mighty buildings, but, as they drew nearer, they could plainly discern that this city of the desert was in ruins.

The High-priest turned to his followers and said, as he pointed toward the crumbling walls and towers,

"Yonder was once an abode of our race, before the earth began to change, for the change began here at an earlier day than elsewhere. Our own forefathers builded that city."

"Have the dwarfs ever been here?" asked Sandelfon.

"No, but they will come, for there will be other changes. These ruins will utterly perish, and a city of the dwarfs will here be built, and that too will be destroyed, leaving only dwarfish ruins as a memorial."

"Let us go forward then, and revisit the homes of our fathers."

"Not so," said Tora, "we must pass it to the North. See to it that our company marches in solid column and that no man strays from his place."

The giants closed up, in their order, but, in spite of Tora's prohibition, there were four who seemed under the control of some subtle fascination which bade them take a nearer view of the ancient city of the giants.

Undoubtedly Tora was aware of this disobedience, but he made no signal and gave no order to recall the delinquents to their duty.

Not far had they wandered, however, when, suddenly, they seemed to pause in their course as if with one accord, and their companions also halted, at a sign from Tora, and gazed after them.

Next, then, the four deserters seemed to decrease in stature, and then it became clear that the earth was slowly swallowing them up.

"They have trodden on a quicksand," exclaimed Sandelfon. "Let us go to their assistance."

"Not so," said Tora. "Here also we must leave a tribute, by the city of our fathers, and the lot has fallen upon these. Watch them!"

It was, indeed, worth watching, and, strangely enough, the other Vahtars looked on calmly and without emotion upon the awful fate of their companions. These latter, however, made no sign of fear, nor any call for help, but kept their faces fixed steadfastly towards the ruined city of their forefathers.

Steadily, together, inch by inch, they sank down through the treacherous and hungry sand, their grand height slowly melting away as they descended. At last they were buried to their armpits, but still they did not avert their unchanging gaze—and then their upraised arms, and their golden crests, and their long, floating plumes, disappeared forever in the remorseless sand.

It was a fearful sight to see, but the followers of Tora seemed to regard it as a matter of course, and the grim high-priest never changed a muscle of his iron countenance.

"It is done," he said, "let us go forward while we may. Let no man look behind him until we have crossed the desert."

It was a three days' march, even for them, however, before they again beheld green grass and trees, or could stretch their weary limbs by the side of flowing water, and they suffered much from heat and thirst, but the desert had no further tribute to claim from the remnant of the giants.

And now they were entering on the great plains of the central basin of North America, and, undismayed by the startling and fatal incidents of their long journey, the cheerful giants lost all thought of the present or the past, and gave themselves up to

the delights and glories of the chase. That which has since been the hunting ground of a thousand tribes, was at that day almost unpeopled, and it still contained some representation of those animals who had been the worthy prey of the ancient Vahtars in the early days. Few, they were, and fast disappearing, but the mammoth and the mastodon had not yet altogether abandoned the earth to the bison and the deer. The elk, too, were of more stately proportions than any which tempt the enthusiasm of modern sportsmen, and the followers of Tora held high carnival for many days. Even the high-priest joined freely in the sport, declaring that he did so in memory of his ancestors.

At last, however, the hunt was concluded, and it was announced that their course must now be northward and eastward.

When, however, the Vahtars were gathered to begin their march, it was ascertained that two of their number were missing though none could tell in what direction they had gone from the camp.

"Shall we search for them, or wait? Oh Tora?" asked Sandelfon.

"No, they will follow our footsteps easily if they return to camp, but I think they will not return."

The prince bowed his head in thought. There was something wonderfully solemn in this unresting fate which followed him and his with such unerring silent footsteps, but there was no answer to be made.

Northward and eastward they went, until on the margin of the great lakes they fought a hard battle with a wild tribe who dwelt there, destroying myriads of their assailants, and when the wearied warriors bathed them in the lake, after the long struggle was over, so many of them were claimed as tribute by the chilly and hungry waters that but fifty Vahtars reassumed their arms and made ready to go onwards.

"These bathers," said Tora, "must leave behind them no token, but their bones may have company at the bottom of the lake in that day when it shall be drained and become dryland. Hurl in after them the weapons and armour which they have left upon the beach."

The warriors obeyed him and from their vigorous arms, he-

metes and shields, cuirasses and greaves, and spears and swords, were spun through the air far out upon the water, flashing and sinking forever out of sight.

"Will these be found when the lake is drained?" asked Sandelfon.

"All that is of gold, or covered with it, but the rest will suffer slow corrosion by the waters," said Tora

"Whither go now?"

"Eastward. But on our way we must stop for a look at one of the tribes of dwarfs that came upon the earth almost in our own day, for they are a very ancient people."

"Wherein do they differ from others?"

"In their ignorance, their vice, and the worship of the Serpent. Also in the nature of their works."

So, eastward and somewhat southward, marched Tora and his men, and from time to time they came upon wandering squads of dwarfs, less than five feet in height, who seemed to have neither arms nor clothing, and who fled timidly at their approach.

"The mound-building dwarfs," said Tora, "are only brave when they are busy at their work and worship."

"Of the Serpent?"

"Yes, and a strange kind of worship it is, for it consists mainly in raising the earth into huge mounds, either shaped like an egg, or coiled in snake-like form."

"Have they any sacrifices?"

"Yes, in the centre of each mound they bury the body of one or more of their number, sometimes dead, sometimes alive, but the burial is never made until the body has been bitten by some venomous serpent which they have caught, and which is also buried with the victim."

Even as they were now speaking, the leading files of the giants came out from under the forest through which they had been marching, upon the brow of a gentle declivity, and in the plain below there were ant-like swarms of unclad human figures, busy with rude tools of wood and stone in the work of piling up the loose and friable soil in a long spiral which bore a rough resemblance to the form of a serpent.

Even when the warriors descended among them, the Mound-

builders betrayed no signs of either fear or wonder, but toiled on without cessation, as if their interest and devotion deprived them even of common curiosity.

In the centre of the space enclosed by the spiral mound, there stood what seemed to be a rude basket of wicker work, and towards this structure advanced several of the giants. Tora stood still and followed them with his eyes, as if waiting to see the result. Perhaps he expected it, or was aware of its character, for he made no sign of astonishment when the overturned basket released from their wicker prison the hissing and venomous rage of many serpents, prepared by the mound-builders for their coming ceremonials.

Now indeed, the dwarfs, with many expressive gestures of fear and indignation, came crowding around the too curious warriors.

Too curious!

Yes, for the serpents seemed to have no spite against their naked worshippers, but assailed with writhing ferocity every unexposed portion of the intruding giants.

The men of the primeval race were peculiarly susceptible to all poisonous influences, and one by one the five mighty forms came reeling down upon the earth.

The eyes of all his followers were turned on their high-priest.

"Is there no healing, oh, Tora?"

"No healing. But we will strip them of their arms and bury them here, that they may be the victims whose bones shall consecrate this shrine of the Old Serpent who has ever been the enemy of us and ours, as he is and will be of those who shall take our place."

And so the obedient warriors, for the serpents had now rapidly disappeared from the vicinity of their prison, scooped out a deep and capacious sepulchre and laid therein the unarmored forms of their fellow comrades, while the dwarfs looked on in stupid admiration, but as if half appeased by the terrible retribution which had overtaken these wonderful strangers. Perhaps their own traditions made them acquainted with the character of their visitors, but at all events, with all their stupidity and brutality, they retained sense enough to attempt no hostile de-

monstrations against beings who could have laughed to scorn their pigmy multitudes.

"Take up the arms," said Tora, "we must leave nothing for these mound-builders to preserve for the inquiring eyes of future generations."

The mail and weapons were made up into packages and distributed among the warriors, and then, at the word of command, the diminished band moved onward towards the rising sun.

CHAPTER XV

THE CAVE AND THE ALTAR.

AND now, for days and days the high-priest and his followers marched on persistently, only pausing for brief rest and spare refreshment.

Sandelfon strode on by the side of his mighty father, but he seldom spoke, for he knew that now the end was not far off, and a shadowy sense of awe was gathering upon his soul.

They were toiling through the tangled undergrowth and fallen trees in a pass of the eastern mountains, and were beginning the descent, when Tora turned and spoke :

"Sandelfon, my son, knowest thou whither we are going?"

"No, and I care not."

"Why not?"

"Last night, as I lay asleep on the gray rocks, I dreamed a dream. I seemed to stand on the shore of a mighty water, and out of it arose the form of Listara, beckoning to me."

"And what didst thou in thy vision?" asked Tora.

"At first I was inclined to plunge in, with all my armor on and swim towards Listara."

"But thou didst not?"

"No, I only advanced until the small waves wet my feet."

"And what then?"

"Listara had vanished, and where the sea had been there was only a thick darkness through which no eye could penetrate."

THE ONANDAGA GIANT.

"It is well. I am glad of this dream of thine."

"Why glad?"

"Because now I know that I may not take thee to the shore of the great eastern sea."

"Why not?"

"Thou wouldst be tempted to escape thy fate."

"Not I, my father, and I fain would see this water."

"It is enough, my son,—thou must come with me."

"So be it! I am ready. But whither go we?"

"Easterly and northerly, to a land which was once the domain of our race, and which shall yet again be the home of those who are giants, though not in bodily size, as we are. They shall be giants in their achievements, in the days to come. It is a strange and a mysterious country, and will give birth to many wonderful things hereafter."

Onward went the Vahtars, but they were becoming weary, and each day did one of them at noontide ask permission to lie down and sleep, nor did Tora at any time refuse, but, as the weary giant stretched himself in slumber, he would bid his comrades strip him of his weapons and his armor.

Already the packages borne by the survivors were becoming irksomely heavy, and at last Sandelfon asked,

"What of these, my father, are we to bear them continually?"

"Wait and see," said Tora.

And on the morning of the second day thereafter they forded a great river, and then Tora informed his followers that they were now in the province to which their long journey had been directed.

"Two days' journey to the north is there a great water, its waters are fresh and not like the sea, but our destination does not yet carry us to its borders."

It was toward noon of that day that another of the Vahtars lay down to slumber.

"Shall he be stripped, oh, Tora?"

"Not so, for he shall carry his armor with him."

Near by, a huge rock stood out on the side of a sloping hill.

"Roll over yonder rock," said Tora.

THE ONONDAGA GIANT.

And, although it required all the strength which their diminished numbers could muster, the obedient giants overset the rock, disclosing the entrance to one of those deep caverns in the limestone formation which the men of our own day so frequently find in that region.

Tora now bade his men prepare torches and follow him.

Take up the body, armed as it is, and bear it with you."

The sleeping Vahtar was uplifted on the crossed staves of spears and borne onward behind the High-priest through the mouth of the cavern, while the rest followed, bringing with them the packages of arms.

The flaring torches lit up the gloomy splendor of the cave, as the giants strode on from one of its compartments to another, and the light was flashed back by the glittering surfaces of stalagmites and stalactites of every imaginable form.

Deeper and deeper went the little band into the bowels of the earth, and now before them, and gradually increasing in its volume of rushing sound came the voice of many waters, thundering on with a violence that shook the solid rock beneath them. In a few minutes more the Vahtars stood by the precipitous edge of a mighty chasm, at whose bottom flowed a subterranean river which put Sandelfon in mind of the torrent which he had seen in the hidden chambers of the temple in the city of the giants.

At a signal from Tora the packages of armor and weapons were hurled out into the black and seething waters.

"Here, too," said Tora, "is to be the tomb of him who slumbered."

And as he spoke, four sinewy warriors raised the unconscious form, and advanced to the slippery edge of the precipice.

Thrice they swung the mail-clad sleeper to and fro, to gather as great a momentum as possible, and then, at the word, they gave all their uttermost strength to the final throw. The two who had held the body by the feet sprang back with the very recoil of their own gigantic effort, but the two who had grasped him by the shoulders seemed unable to let go their fatal hold, and were precipitated, together with their awful burden, into the black abyss of angry waters.

Not a cry arose from those who were witnesses of this terrible

catastrophe, but all silently turned in their tracks and followed Tora and Sandelfon out of the cave.

On arriving once more in the outer air, Tora commanded that the huge boulder be rolled back into its place, that the mouth of the cave might be sealed forever from curiosity.

"Will the dwarfs never find it?" asked Sandelfon.

"I know not. It is certain, however, that the waters of the river will never surrender their secret."

"Shall there be, then, no record at all left of us to after ages?"

"Aye, they will find our bones, and here and there fragments of our weapons, and they will refuse the evidence of their own eyes. But thou, even thou, my son, art destined to be thyself the most perfect record of all, and I know not if they will believe even thee."

"How, shall I live forever?"

"Not so, but thy form shall never know decay, and ages hence men shall look upon thee, but little changed from that which thou seemest now."

"And how shall that come to pass, my father?"

"Thy fate is now near at hand, and we are hastening on to meet it. Art thou ready?"

"I am ready. But it is a strange and a wonderful thing."

"So the dwarfs will think, doubtless, in the days when they have ceased to believe in the existence of the primeval race of the royal Vahtars."

"But of what use the record, if men will not believe?"

"Perhaps they will do so. At all events, that which is written is written, and it is not for us to gainsay the ancient writings."

"Not, at least, for the son of Tora, and the heir of the royal priesthood."

"Thou art worthy of thy line, my son. And now let us press onward."

"Is there haste?"

"No, but time draws nearer with each setting sun."

Even here, among the forests, the giants discovered comparatively fresh tokens of the work of the mound-builders, though in place of that now disappearing race, they occasionally encoun-

red parties of dwarfs, who, if wilder and more dangerous, were of a higher type of manhood, and not only wore clothing but bore arms. These were of the race of *hunters*, which have everywhere followed in the footsteps of the mere *diggers* and mound-raisers.

At first all these kept aloof, but it soon became evident that, though keeping carefully concealed behind the thickets and forest trees, they were steadily dogging the footsteps of the strangers, though evidently not prepared yet to come into direct collision with so formidable a set of antagonists.

"Are these, oh, Tora," said Sandelfon, "the men who are to come after us?"

"Yes, but their time will be comparatively short. Less than two thousand years, with many changes of tribe and race, and these will give way to the men of whom I have told you.

"The memorial of the primeval race will not be left for them, nor will they ever look upon that which they could not understand. They are mere wild animals, of a higher grade."

"I would I might be conscious, in these days that are to come."

"I cannot say anything beyond that which is written, but thou must be content with thy fate."

"I am content. But thou, my father, what fate is thine?"

"Mine and thine are one, except that I shall pass away and leave no sign behind me—no token of my existence, except as one of the race to which thou art destined to bear record."

"Dost thou go with me?"

"After thee, and yet before thee."

"I do not understand."

"Neither do I. It is enough for us that we both work together in fulfilment of the immutable decrees."

The day came, and, with the morning light, Tora awoke and counted his remaining warriors. They were twenty-four, besides himself and his son.

"The number is complete," said he, "and they are enough."

And now they were marching into a rough and hilly country, without mountains or extended plains, but traversed by beautiful streams, and dotted here and there with lakes and ponds, of various size, and wooded to the very margin of the water.

"Here is, indeed," said Sandelfon, "a region that might be the home of a brave and mighty people."

"Such it shall one day become," said Tora.

And at last the high-priest summoned his followers to a halt, on the gentle slope of a hill-side which rose towards the east.

"Hereabouts," said Tora, "should be the spring."

"What spring?" asked Sandelfon.

"The fountain which envelopes and preserves. There are many such, but this one has waited for one mission and will perform no other when this shall be accomplished."

Bidding his followers wait where they stood, the royal priest of the Vahtars walked slowly up the hill-side, muttering to himself, as if striving to recall to memory topographical records which time and distance had rendered somewhat dim.

The gentle slope was clear of either trees, or stones of any size, except that, half-way up, one water-worn boulder of blue limestone seemed poised upon its base, as if only a touch were needed to send it rolling into the little valley below. Towards this Tora bent his footsteps, and, after surveying it for a moment he walked around and pressed with all his strength upon the upper side. For a moment the rock seemed to resist him, but then it started from its place and bounded forward like a living thing, while, from the hollow which its removal had left bare, there gushed, with the vehemence of a weak but long pent up force, the crystal waters of a small, pure spring.

"This is the fountain!" almost shouted the royal Vahtar

"It is like any other fountain," said Sandelfon.

"Not so, my son. Above this spring, in days gone by, towered one of the earlier temples of thy forefathers"

"I see no traces of such a shrine."

"No, for it was builded of the trees which thy ancestors dug out from the muddy banks which were left by the great flood, and, when they themselves moved southward, the fires which they kindled left nothing but ashes around the rock with which they had sealed the fountain. We ourselves, however, will here re-erect the shrine on which no fire has been kindled for ages. Let us set about our work."

And so under the supervision of the wise Tora, the giants set

themselves at work, and brought to a knoll hard by the mysterious fountain, the rocks and boulders which lay scattered at no great distance, and, before the sun had set, they had erected the resemblance of a rude altar, on whose flat surface they at once kindled a fire, in imitation of that whose smoke had once arisen from the summit of the central pyramid in the city of the giants, far away among the tropical valleys of the distant south.

"Sandelfon, my son," said Tora, "all is now prepared, and we are weary- Let us rest."

And so, around the altar which their hands had raised, the remnant of the band slumbered till morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE first rays of sunrise once more summoned the Vahtars to their solemn duties. Some little more attention was paid to the completion of the altar, and the fire was rekindled.

"Tora, my father," said Sandelfon, "is this the day of which thou hast so often spoken?"

"This is the day,"

"Am I never more to look upon the setting sun?"

"No, my son, thou last most noble scion of a kingly race, the time has arrived for the extinction of thy people."

"But thou, and these?" and, as he spoke, Sandelfon waved his arm toward the group of tall figures who stood around the altar in the dim, gray light of the early morning.

"Their fate and mine are less noble than thine, but we shall not linger behind thee. Seest thou not the altar?"

"I do."

"And is it not like the one on the ancient pyramid?"

"Rudely like."

"Read in it then a lesson concerning that which thou shalt not behold with thine eyes."

"Alas, my father! Must the star of the primeval race go down in blood?"

"Aye, and in fire."

"Well, I am ready."

"But no view of them will be opened, my son."

"How then?"

"Thou shalt but sleep."

"To wake again?"

"Not on this earth, which is to keep thy body hidden in its bosom."

"Where then?"

"That I know not, but thou art thyself familiar with the traditions which have been handed down from those of old. They are dark and mysterious, but they contain only truth."

"So be it, then, my father."

And now the fire was blazing high upon the altar, and was constantly fed with fierce-burning, resinous woods, while around it, leaning on their spears stood the silent and almost motionless forms of the Vahtar warriors.

The sacred spring had made for itself a little channel down the hillside, but was soon lost among the leaves and gravel in the valley below.

And now, under the direction of the High-priest, the warriors proceeded to the performance of a strange and ominous labor.

Working in squads of four at a time, they dug a deep rectangular pit on the side of the slope, somewhat longer one way than another, which gradually assumed the appearance of a gigantic grave. Deeper and deeper they dug, lifting out the soil upon their gilded bucklers, until at the upper end the pit may have been ten feet deep, and somewhat less at the lower. They met with few stones of any size, and these were thrown to some distance.

At last Tora said,

"It is enough. We must go no deeper into the earth."

Around the pit, in solemn but unquestioning curiosity, the remaining Vahtars gathered, as if wondering what should be its destined contents.

"Seest thou this pit, Sandelfon?" asked Tora.

"I see, and I can imagine its use."

"It is to be thy own resting place."

"A cold one, but I am content."

"Art thou ready?"

"I am prepared."

"Come then with me"

Father and son now advanced in front of the altar and stood facing it. At a signal from Tora, well known in their sacrificial ceremonials, the eldest of the warriors rapidly divested himself of his armor and strode forward.

It has already been said that self immolation was the crowning honor of the life of a Vahtar, and something of disgrace was held to be implied in any other termination of existence. Especially was this sacrificial attribute of their proud descent likely to be held in honor by this chosen band to whom had been committed the closing scenes of their eventful history, and the last act was performed with prompt cheerfulness by the giant who had been summoned.

The flames leaped higher yet around his falling body, but not even the blood which his willing hand had shed seemed to decrease their fervor. The sacrificial knife lay ready on the edge of the altar, and, as the signal was repeated, one after another, in the order of their age, the ready Vahtars followed their unhesitating companions, until the number of seven had been reached, and then, for a moment, the arm of Tora dropped at his side, and he bowed his stately head, as if overcome with a sense of the awful solemnity of the occasion.

It was but for a moment, and then he once more looked steadfastly into the deep, bright eyes of Sandelfon.

"Thy helmet, my son."

The Prince unclasped and removed the glittering headpiece which had so often flashed in the van of battle, or towered above his comrades in the halls of the ancient city.

Tora first broke away the long and floating plumes and cast them on the fire. He next drew out from the folds of his robe a large vial of crystal, which seemed to contain some colorless liquid. This he held aloft for a moment, and then, as he poured its contents into the helmet, as into a festal chalice, he cried—

"Sandelfon, art thou ready?"

"I am ready!" replied the deep and powerful but now almost mournful voice of the prince.

"Then bid good-bye to the sunlight and the forest and drain this draught."

Sandelfon took the helmet from the hands of his father. Not for the first time was it serving as a drinking goblet, though never before had it held aught more hurtful than the freshly pressed blood of the grape.

One look, one long, unblenching gaze, the prince gave to the bright face of the unclouded sun. One sweeping survey of the hill and valley and forest, and then he lifted the helmet's brim to his lips and at one breath drained it dry.

If he had expected some instantaneous effect, he was disappointed, and in a moment more he opened his eyes again, and said—

"What is this, my father?"

"Remove thine armour."

With rapid fingers the Prince unclasped piece after piece and threw them on the grass, and at another word from Tora he also stripped off his under tunic, until his massive form stood up, revealed in all its powerful mould and beauty.

"Now step thee down into the pit," said Tora.

Sandelfon mutely obeyed, and as he did so, he experienced a strange feeling of benumbing cold creep over him, and the light faded from before his eyes.

"Lie not down, my son, but stand erect in thy place."

"Whence is this cold, oh, Tora?"

"Thou wilt soon be forever unconscious of either cold or heat, my son."

"It is growing dark, oh, Tora."

"They who sleep as thou shalt sleep have no need to see."

"Fare thee well, oh, Tora, my father!"

"Sleep well, my son! Sleep well, last of the ancient and royal race. Sleep well, Prince of the Vahtars! Thou shalt be a memorial of our existence to those who shall look upon thy face in the ages that are to come."

Even as Tora was speaking, the Prince began to totter upon

his feet, and then, slowly, and as if unwillingly yielding to the subtle power which was overwhelming his strength, he sank upon the bottom of the open grave, in an attitude of uneasy and even painful slumber.

The remaining warriors, gathered in a silent ring, had watched with breathless interest the actions of their leader and his son, and now one of the younger spoke:

"Oh, Tora, shall I not step down into the pit and arrange the limbs of the Prince?"

"Not so," said Tora. "As he has fallen, so he must lie, nor must any hand be laid upon him. There is other work for us to do."

In mute obedience the Vahtars followed the instructions of their High-priest, not doubting but that all that was done was well done.

A narrow channel was dug, leading from the sacred spring to the head of the grave, and in a few moments more the magical waters, muddy at first, but fast resuming their crystal purity, were rippling over the edge of the pit and spreading upon the gravelly soil at the bottom. Here too they were mingled with the soluble soil, and as they rose slowly higher and higher they threatened to cover the sleeping Prince from view.

"Will he not drown, oh, Tora?"

"Water has no longer any power over the Prince of the Vahtars," said Tora.

"Is he then already dead?"

"Such a sleep as his may well be likened unto death, for there will be never any more awakening for him."

Slowly still rose the clouded water, under the steady gaze of the awed spectators, until at last the body of the Prince was entirely covered. Not the slightest sign of consciousness had he given, since he sank upon the earth in the cramped and all but distorted posture which he had first assumed.

And now, at a gesture from Tora, the warriors drew back from the grave, and while some of them proceeded to heap fresh fuel on the flames of the altar, others gathered the arms and armor

of the Prince and the seven self-immolated victims, and prepared them to be borne away.

These duties done, Tora spoke,

"We shall have but one more walk, my brethren, follow me."

Not many miles from the place of Sandelfon's mysterious burial, there was then, and still is, a singular lake or pond, not much more than half a mile in circumference at its edge, but lying at the bottom of a sort of vast "bowl," whose sides descend precipitately in rugged ledges. There is no visible inlet or outlet, and no sounding line has yet discovered the bottom of the dark and silent water.

Thitherward did Tora lead his surviving followers, and paused not until they halted on the brink.

There they paused, however, without attempting the steep descent, and, at the bidding of Tora, they hurled out into the centre of the gloomy lake, not only the heavy packages which they had brought with them, but afterwards their own weapons and mail, divesting themselves of everything metallic which they had worn or carried.

"Come," said Tora. "Our duties for this day are not yet accomplished. Let us return."

More swiftly than when they came, the now unarmed and defenceless giants marched back towards the altar and the grave, careless of the fact that they had seen more than one of the wild hunters appearing and disappearing among the trees of the surrounding forest. Knowing that their fate was near, they could hardly afford to indulge in emotions of caution, much less of fear.

Nevertheless, they made haste, and brief space of time was required to bring them once more in view of the eddying smoke which still poured upward from the altar. So far as they could ascertain, even upon a closer inspection, no foot of man had ventured near the unguarded shrine during their absence, and the grave of Sandelfon remained undisturbed.

And now, around this last the Vahtar warriors gathered and gazed down into the pit.

By this time the earthy particles had all settled from the water,

leaving it clear and pure, so that, though the body of the Prince was now more than a foot below the surface, it was distinctly visible in all its marble whiteness of skin and the perfection of its tremendous outlines.

The face seemed now to wear a calm and dignified smile, as if even death should be looked in the face with only pleasurable emotions, but the limbs had not straightened themselves out.

Tora motioned to one of his followers—

“Bring thou here the dead bough of a tree.”

It was brought at once.

“Strike now, lightly, upon the bosom of the Prince.”

The warrior obeyed, but, to his amazement, the smooth flesh yielded not to the blow, nor to any after pressure, though Tora forbade the employment of any great degree of strength.

Calm and cold and rigid lay the Prince, as if carved in stone.

“What means this, oh Tora?” asked the warrior. “It was never before seen like unto this.”

“Knowest thou not how carefully we have hidden or destroyed every other token or record of our race?”

“All, except the very stones of our ancient city, and they bear the marks of destroying fire.”

“Even as we have done, so did our ancestors when the changes of the world compelled them to abandon their ancient seats among these hills and move away to the southward.”

“Did they then leave no token?”

“None. Not even as much as we have done, for they knew that we were to come after them, while we know that we stand here this day, the last of our race.”

“The very last?”

“Aye, and before the sun goes down there will remain none to say *last*.”

“Shall the body of the Prince Sandelfon remain where it is, on, Tora? Will it not be found by these dwarfs, hereafter?”

“Not until every other memory of the existence of the Vah-tars shall have disappeared. Even this wild race of dwarfs who have looked upon us this day will no longer remain to preserve even a tradition of our appearance. And now let us complete the burial.”

It was sometime before the pit was filled in around the seeming sleeper, but at last only the face and chest of Sandelfon appeared. And now, by direction of Tora, all the upper part of him was covered with fine gravel, laid on with care, and as they still further filled up the grave, the water of the spring was so directed that it should continue to filter down through this artificial stratum and complete its work of solidification.

The pit once filled, a sort of covered drain from the spring to the grave was made with gravel, in the ordinary manner, and then the little fountain no more appeared above the surface of the ground.

And now the grave was covered with a mass of brush and leaves and these were set on fire, that the locality might be as completely disguised as possible, in case any eyes should peer at too early a day upon the scene which there would soon be no one left to guard. Meantime, the fire upon the altar had not been neglected, but kept at the utmost possible fierceness of heat,—a consuming blaze under which flesh and bones seemed to yield almost without resistance.

Rapidly and zealously as the giants had labored, the sun was now but an hour above the horizon, and the warriors ceased from their work and turned their eyes upon the stern grim face of the High-priest, on which a certain new and awful majesty was gathering.

"Oh, remnant of the great and primeval race, the hour is come for us to depart from the earth!"

"We are ready."

"Ye have seen by what sort of a memorial the record of your existence will be handed down."

"The earth will keep it's secret forever, oh, Tora!"

"Nay, only until the day appointed for the unfolding. When that hour shall come is not to be known from the writings of our fathers, but come it will."

And now, once more the High-priest approached the altar and placed the naked sacrificial knife upon its edge, and again he raised his arm and gave the fatal signal, and now as heretofore he was promptly obeyed by the eldest remaining warrior

There was no burst of wild music, as of old, around the pyra-

mid in the city of the giants, but the deep, trumpet-like and not unmelodious voice of Tora himself, as the first victim disappeared through the smoke at the altar, began even a grander chant than that which had sounded above the crash and carnage of the last grand battle-field of his race. It was the death chant of the Vahtars, and it told of their ancient glories, in the days when the young earth had not yet ceased to be a fit abiding place for any but the dwarfish descendants of Adam. Old wars, old wonders, and the names of immemorial cities, mingled their resonant praises in the swelling cadences of this wonderful melody, and ever and anon, the long arm of Tora would summon yet another victim.

At last the High-priest paused; the song for a moment died away upon his lips; his head sank upon his bosom, and his arm fell by his side. There was no more need to give the sacrificial signal, for Tora, the Priest-Prince of the Vahtars, stood facing the setting sun, the last of a race that had called the earth their own in the days before the flood.

Only for a moment, however, did the chant die away. Once more it was resumed with even grander volume, while the singer busied himself with heaping wood upon the altar, till all upon and around was one mass of glowing coals and leaping flame, and then, with the wild chant still sounding forth from the central fire, the form of Tora also disappeared on the last altar of the primeval race.

THE END.

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